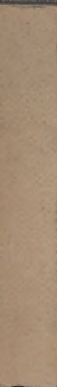




MOVING WATERS



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EDWARD NOBLE

MOVING WATERS

A STORY OF
THE TWO SEA SERVICES

. . . watching, with eternal lids apart,
Like Nature's patient, sleepless Eremite,
The moving waters at their priest-like task
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores.

KEATS.



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1914

BOOK I

LOW WILLOWS

“ The really serious danger that this country has to guard against in war is not invasion, but interruption of trade and the destruction of our Mercantile Marine.”—ADMIRALTY MEMORANDUM.

CHAPTER I

CARL SCHULTZ

"ZERE is a law in the East," said Von Schultz, "which announces itself in a derogation of terms. 'Zere is no God but God,' it says, 'and Mahomet is his Prophet.' We who are Germans consider that is a mistake. We have no illusions. We say, '*Gott weis Alles, aber der Kaiser weis Alles besser.*'"

Mr Nesbit's lips formed a straighter line, that is all, upon his answer. "I agree," he said, "that the trend of modern thought in Germany rather emphasizes that; still, I do not suppose the phrase means all it implies."

"You mean the position we give to All-Highest?"

"Quite."

"Oh, but my dear sir, it must be obvious to everyone who has been in contact with Berlin of late years that we mean it. You, I recognize with sorrow, have been a long time stranger to us. The facts are plain. We say, 'If the Herd is not ordered, he will not obey.' In ozzier words, if you derogate from the authority of the All-Highest by making him less than All-Highest, how can the Herd consider him All-Highest?"

Nesbit's foot gave token of negation. He was very quiet. "I think," he said, "you forget that there *is* a God—call Him what you will. I think your professors have been too insistent on that, and that it will harm Germany."

"Our professors act always on the principle that you cannot have two All-Highests when before all men zere is one All-Highest."

"I agree, they are like your Goethe's Mephistopheles. 'Stick to words,' he says, 'for with words you can do anything. Out of words you can build systems and construct creeds'—you remember?"

"Of course."

"And so you eliminate God?"

Von Schultz wriggled impatiently, finger in ear. "Zere is no God in zat sense to-day in Germany. Only primitive people require a God they cannot see."

Sunlight flooded the hill-side beyond Low Willows, throwing blue shadows upon grassland that billowed under a gusty breeze. It fell upon the lawn facing these two men, the one an English gentleman, the other his guest: the quiet, beautiful lawn where a peacock moved majestically spreading his tail. It touched a

cluster of gold and purple iris bordering a path which hemmed the shrubs ; threw patches of radiance, dappled, wonderful to consider, and left the distant trees in serrated lines of blue which fell away to meet the blue which canopied all, high up there at the top of Leith Hill.

It was five o'clock, an English May day waning, and Mrs Nesbit already in the garden with those who had finished tea. The two men alone remained oblivious of the call of spring and a garden of untamed beauty. Schultz monopolized the conversation and the cigarettes with the air of a man who is completely at his ease ; but Jimmy Haines, who had followed Mrs Nesbit, Dorothea and his brother to the lawn, said that Schultz's ease was the ease of a bounder. Swollen head, shekels and a Junker training all came, in some subtle fashion, in justification of this judgment. He said, too, that the City Germans were all the same—rotters ; and the only Germans he could stick were naval officers, who, it appeared, had gone out of their way to give Jimmy's section of the British fleet a good time when last it came in touch with them.

Jimmy's brother, William Atherton Haines—Jag, as he was affectionately called by the family—went even farther ; but then it must be remembered that he was a captain in the British Merchant Service, whereas Jimmy was of Osborne and Dartmouth and now a one-striper in the Navy.

From this it will be seen that their opportunities of judging races had been conducted from different platforms. The Navy is British all through ; the Merchant Service so full of substitutes for Englishmen that it has been found necessary to institute for would-be sailors an examination in the mother-tongue of England before they are permitted to sign on. Jag Haines in his climb to command therefore had found finer opportunities for getting behind the German screen than Jimmy. He had seen these men ashore and afloat, in the gin-palace and on a top-s'l yard, in the counting-house and acting as British Consuls, and he had discovered in them something not to be found in other races, something which set them apart from the rest of mankind. He could not have told you how they differed, for there one trenches on racial factors and psychological data which are beyond the ken of sailors burdened by the task of getting one man to do the work of three. Indeed, he could have explained with point and detail why Germans are known as Square-heads on board ship ; but at the moment he was engaged with Dorothea drinking great draughts of fascination, and found the occupation much to his liking.

Jimmy Haines, walking sedately with Mrs Nesbit and recounting trivial details of his calling, found it depressing to remember that Jag seemed hand and glove with Dorothea and rather wondered if anything was up between them. He could not ask Mrs Nesbit . . . besides, Mrs Nesbit was interested in an expression he had used and wanted to know what juice meant when applied to men-o'-war.

Jimmy, brought to bay, said he had never considered it. It was juice, always. Electricity was juice, so was water, or steam . . . "anything you turn on, you know, when you want to make things move. If you want to peel potatoes, for instance, you turn on the juice, and round they go. . . ."

"And in that case, what is it you turn on?"

"Electricity, Mrs Nesbit."

"Then juice is power?"

"Yes, I suppose it is. Electric power, motor power, steam . . . any kind of old power."

And that brought Jimmy to the stage when he wished he could switch the juice on those two over there by the balcony and separate them. It seemed jolly bad form to monopolize a girl all the afternoon, and now when tea was over to go mooning beside a balcony looking at sunsets when there were other people to be considered. . . . It wasn't as though they wanted to climb the old trees again, or fish for newts on Cranwood Common—they were men now, and Dorothea more enjoyable than Jimmy had thought possible in the days of torn dresses and soiled shorts. . . . Good Lord! What a time they had had, and how Dorothea could run!

Meanwhile Nesbit and Von Schultz had moved by slow stages to finance and the possibility of a larger horizon as seen through a banker's glasses. It was not the first time they had discussed this question; but to-night Nesbit scarcely seemed sympathetic. Schultz had given him ground for reflection: he had spoken in a tone which was not quite diplomatic for a man engaged in persuading another to transfer his capital to German Stocks. For Carl Schultz was a banker—one of those Cosmopolitan Financiers trained by an insatiable Fatherland to dominate the world; while Jupiter Nesbit, to give him his strange name, was an affluent person whose unearned increment seemed to be in need of translation.

Nesbit objected to certain forms of taxation—the income-tax

among others. The matter had been discussed before, but no decision had been taken. Now, for some reason, Schultz seemed inclined to hasten matters, and Nesbit equally inclined to move slowly. Schultz considered this stupid. He did not recognize that his talk had jarred on Nesbit's finer sensibilities, and when Nesbit finally took refuge in the unstable political atmosphere, the risk of war and the advance of Socialism which might bemuse Germany, he leaned forward urging his views, a cigarette dancing on his lips as he spoke.

"Zere is no need for fear about that," he said. "We are so strong that nussing can break us. Krupps alone compel fear. The Socialist in Germany is German first and Socialist after. He stands, as we who are Prussians, for law and order in all cases of world tumult. Our power is so colossal that no one will dare challenge us. You have admitted that yourself. It is unthinkable."

Nesbit looked up through a cloud of smoke, nodding.

"Yes—you are on firm ground there; but suppose your Socialists are not what you say they are, what is to prevent the Kaiser doing as his grandfather did to Denmark and Austria and France, to give them something else to think about?"

"It is impossible. We require peace. The business world of Germany demands it."

"But the Junkers demand war . . ."

"I do not sink so. War would be stupid, absurd. We win without war in our race with the world. We win because we are born to win; because we are strong, disciplined, ready . . . but even so," he shrugged, "grant that war comes—how does that affect you? You are of our blood. We have no cause to fight England, you have no cause to fight Germany. . . . It would be the colossal blunder of all. How is it possible to consider it?"

"I put it as a supposition merely. Leave England out of the question—what about the French or Russian issue?"

"Zere again we have no quarrel, we do not fight with either. In spite of this stupid talk Germany will not make war. . . . Do we wish to fight a war on two frontiers? It is absurd. We stand on guard—nussing more. If we are attacked we fight, of course—as you yourselves would fight; otherwise we joust continue as we go. We absorb, make friends where we can, develop our Colonies, add ship to ship and factory to factory; build up, strengthen, consolidate, so that in the end we are world-power without firing a shell. . . ."

"In the case of 1864 and 'sixty-six and 'seventy it was otherwise. We were not then a Nation. Now we are one so strong"—he discarded the cigarette and leaned forward pounding with one fist an outstretched palm—"that if any Nation makes us fight we turn at once and he is wiped out, lost from the map of Europe in a month . . . in two at the outside, and again we rest on our sword. . . ."

"Oh ! I tell you it is fine, this sense of perfect security which strength gives to us. My dear Mr Nesbit, if France declared war on Germany, in a month there would be no France. Russia ? Russia is in our toils. We are everywhere in Russia. Her armies would not live a month before us. The Czar would be prisoner to his own people. . . . New Rulers in power—ours ; new laws in existence—ours. . . . That is so certain as that I with one hand can crush the egg I have already cracked. What is left ?"

Nesbit drew breath slowly. The man was fascinating, in spite of certain hints which seemed to lurk in eyes none too plainly seen. Nesbit was puzzled—and he had a great veneration for Germany.

"I like your grit," he said at length, "and your enthusiasm. I grant you have the power ; but let us examine it from all points. Suppose England joined France and Russia. . . . I should look rather foolish, should I not, with my affairs in your hands in Germany ?"

"That," said Carl Schultz, "is an impossible supposition."

"Why ?"

"Because you have no Army."

"Our Navy exists, does it not ?"

"Certainly—but navies fight at sea. This we are so long supposing would be a land war." Schultz rose from his chair and towered above the smaller man. "England in no case will come in. I know that from my cousin who is Secretary of Legation to Prince Litchnowsky. I know also that it is understood in Berlin that in no case would England fight. It would be ended before she could move one man or one gun. . . . So your money is safe with us, Mr Nesbit, if you choose to trust it in our hands."

"Thank you. I am sure of it."

"Then you will give the necessary orders soon ? The moment is good for selling, and presently"—he smiled, in spite of the mask he showed—"it may not be so good."

Nesbit stirred uneasily in his chair, stiffening perhaps more than he was aware. He rose as he gave an answer.

"All business transactions," he said in his quizzical intonation, "should be carried out in writing, my lawyers tell me. Although I am not a business man, I propose to write my decision tomorrow, eh? Good! Come, let us join the ladies."

They passed on to the terrace and, after a lengthy turn, discovered the ladies occupied. Jag Haines leaned over a balustrade at the foot of the garden where a beautiful peep existed between the trees; but he was not engaged with the landscape. It was Dorothea leaning beside him who held his attention—Dorothea clad in filmy draperies and looking, to the hungry gaze of the young banker, like a nymph in her woodland screen. A little apart sat Mrs Nesbit and Jimmy, the dapper naval officer to whom Schultz had lately been presented. They were not speaking; they seemed engrossed in those two who leaned on the balustrade.

"They look very interesting," said Carl Schultz, "all of them."

"We are very old friends," Nesbit vouchsafed; but it was plain he was putting forth an excuse in which he had no belief.

"And the sailors are making the best of their opportunities—no?"

"I confess," came the reply, "that I am entirely in the dark as to their movements. I am so much engaged with my instruments that I forget Dorothea is no longer a child."

"She is entrancing," said Carl Schultz, without hesitation or intent.

"You too?" laughed his companion. "Come—I shall have to turn my glasses to earth."

It seemed to the German that this was a challenge to proceed. His pulses throbbed. In spite of what he saw outlined there, against the balustrade, he decided to make his appeal. After all, why not? He was of some substance, an old friend; while these two were—sailors. He looked at Nesbit as they drew back.

"I hoped," he said, with a new ring in his voice, "to have the honour of asking your permission to address Miss Nesbit, sir . . . but I fancy from what we saw that perhaps I am too late. . . ."

"Who knows?" Nesbit answered, the smile dead. "I am somewhat in the dark. . . . I had no idea of this. I had no idea that you wished it either. I am astonished at my blindness. I must speak to my wife. . . ." He became more perturbed the farther his words led him. He ruffled his hair, stood still, seemed inclined to retrace his steps. Then Schultz broke in with—

"I have said nussing to Miss Nesbit, but I am her slave. I love

her, and if she deign to consider my proposal, if you give me leave to speak, I promise to do all in my power to make her happy."

"I am sure you would. I am sure you would. I cannot imagine any man willingly trying to make her unhappy. . . ."

"Zen I have your permission to speak?" Schultz urged with an intonation which rang true.

"I cannot forbid it. My daughter is of an age to know her mind. . . . Besides, I am one of those who consider it unwise to interfere in these matters. I would rather have nothing to do with getting rid of my daughter . . . you see that? So, in spite of my great admiration for your Nation, and a certain friendship I have for yourself, I shall exercise no pressure. It must be as Dorothea herself desires."

"Thank you. I ask no more," said Carl Schultz. "I hope presently, if I may stay, the opportunity may come. . . ."

"Quite. Stay to dinner. The sailors will be gone. . . . I happen to know so much of our arrangements, at all events to-day. Sometimes it is otherwise."

It was in this fashion that the astronomer touched now and then gently on the task which absorbed him while others slept.

CHAPTER II

IN THE GARDEN

TWO motors stood on the drive before the house awaiting their masters. The first, known as The Ford, had arrived some hours earlier carrying Jag and Jimmy Haines, and very likely would require some persuasion before the brothers were able to restart it for home. The second was a powerful Rolls-Royce standing nearer the portico—a silver and grey monster displaying the badge of the Automobile Association, a chauffeur in grey livery of soldierly aspect, and a small German flag fluttering on its bonnet. It was the direct antithesis of the Haines' car, even as Schultz who owned it was the antithesis of the two sailors. It seemed to point disdainfully at the lesser car, very much as Schultz, had he been questioned, might have snapped fingers at the brothers.

Sailors! Men of the calling most obnoxious to all who loved the Fatherland; one of the bugbear Navy, it is true; the other of a service diagnosed by the colossal Ballin¹ as one consisting for the most part of second-rate tramps constructed of the cheapest materials and capable of steaming only at the slowest speed, which is to say—the British Merchant Service.

In any case, there stood Von Schultz's car, its silvered fittings tinged with gold where a ray of sunlight touched them, spotless and very competent to crush all competing cars. Dorothea had seen it and admired it. She said as it throbbed, at rest beside the Haines boys' car, that it was her one ambition to own such a car. Her eyes danced as she said it, and the Haines boys' hearts fluttered in unison when they considered the cost and wondered, each in his own way, when it would be possible to give her her heart's desire.

They knew Dorothea, you see, when it had been possible to climb trees together, beard the Rectory cook and carry off the wherewithal to make lunch at the foot of the trees. They had "swopped" eggs and stamps, presented each other, using the approved slang, you may be sure, with butterflies and silkworms; had thumbed the same lesson books and reached home grimy and bedraggled from excursions on Cranwood, where it was damp and mushy, and newts and gnats abounded.

That was in the idyll stage of life, before cars were quite common and Schultz, the German banker, whose eyes twinkled

¹ Herr Ballin, of the Hamburg-Amerika Service.

like black beads in slits of fat, came to trouble them with suggestions which Dad said might blossom. It was before Jag Haines went off in a blue reefer suit with beautiful brass buttons to learn to be a sailor by swotting at books and things in a ship called *Port Jackson*; and before Jimmy Haines, disdaining all mediocre callings, decided to go to Osborne to learn how to fight with real guns.

It was far, far back at the beginning of things, when it did not very much matter how Dorothea did her hair provided it kept out of her eyes, or how she dressed or whether her hands were grubby when she was out with the boys, provided she consented to sit prim and demure while Mr Haines preached and smacked the Bible to keep folk awake. Of course, Dorothea could not conceive that he would smack the Bible for any other reason. The boys would have disillusioned her in that case even as they disillusioned her in later years on the "beautiful rooms" they inhabited—one on the midshipman's flat of a scrimshank cruiser with little head room between decks, the other as fifth officer in the Eastern Mail Service in a cabin where the fourth officer occupied the "upper pew."

It was the age when disillusionment was easy and the arguments used soon forgotten; when all other worshippers at the shrine of Dorothea were quickly punched out of it, and the haloes standing over stained-glass saints in Dad's church certainly were used when no congregation were present for quoits—"just like people did at parish teas on the lawn." Dorothea was quite positive this was so, otherwise how account for the hoop poised rakishly over the bald head of St James? Anyone could see the poor man was expecting it to fall. . . only, it never did fall when Dorothea was watching. That puzzled her. But Jag Haines explained that this was because Dorothea could not squint. She tried, of course, and once Jimmy said she very nearly got there, and the two boys danced round her squinting horribly and wagging their tongues till she was giddy. They said that was how the saints behaved when people who could squint were watching.

Naturally Dorothea believed them. Had they not grown up together and fidgeted in the same church?

Indeed, all these things had happened so long ago that Dorothea had quite forgotten her heartbreak and the smudged face she presented to a looking-glass after seeing Jag and Jimmy off for

their first voyages—for it had happened with each in turn—and the perfect happiness of the days when they returned.

Neither had come back looking quite as she expected. They seemed older, quieter, less spontaneous. Jag especially seemed quieter. He no longer squinted or wagged his tongue, but talked of a half-deck, of weavily biscuits and the junk which men eat. Jimmy, too, had forgotten all about the saints' gambols and talked of a rattan which made a fellow "sit up" for a week if it caught him fair. But after a few days in the Rectory garden and a stroll among the strawberries at Low Willows matters improved so far that a climb in some of the old trees became possible and Dorothea tore her skirt from clue to earring, as Jag declared in a phrase that left her wondering. Then, just when everything was as it used to be, "all hunky-boy and no sneaks about," the heartbreak came again.

Dorothea grew to hate the sea which formerly she had loved because it was so delicious to dabble in it with the boys. She buried herself in her room when it had claimed them and taken them from her.

Then came tales of strange lands, of blazing sun, islands, coral reefs and brown and yellow men from Jag; stories of the gun-room, the Mediterranean and feluccas which sailed "wrong side up" over the desert from Jimmy. Tales of admirals and captains and skippers who were martinets and others who were merely jam; of Governors and evolutions and targets which no one could hit if Jimmy were not with the gun-layer—marvels, you comprehend, which *le bon Dieu* finds for the lips of youth—which brought sweet Dorothea to a new stage: one that became her well. She learned to be proud of her boys, revelled in their adventures and dreamed when they were gone of piracy as conducted, of course, by a maid of seventeen on the lines laid down by Clark Russell.

And now these boys were men, one a captain in the Merchant Service, the other sub-lieutenant in a battle-cruiser and already pining to be Number One in a destroyer—for the sake of Dorothea.

Add to this burden Von Schultz with his most wonderful car and you have the sum of a very pretty problem wilfully fashioned by the gods for a maid's undoing. Yet Dorothea when the question was put to her did not turn a hair. It happened that evening in the garden, after Mr Nesbit had given his consent, as part of the game of life which belongs to each actor inalienably.

May is a wondrous month in our England, but Schultz was scarcely the man to recognize its beauties or the advantages they provided for one who could read them. Sometimes the mood comes in April, sometimes in June, but always we who are English welcome it with lifted pulses. Dorothea moved in ecstasy under its touch. She was like a nymph in her glade, her colour heightened from a talk with Jag and his brother, her eyes glistening, her heart attuned to love, because . . . Oh ! well, were not her trees in leaf again, clothed in the tenderest greens and yellows ? Were not her shrubs ablaze with colour so fine that Dorothea was perplexed to name their hue ? She laughed, as others have, at the American who talked of British samples and bid him match this which was hers. She caught sight of rhododendrons, arbutis, lilac, may—all jumbled and towering cheek by jowl with syringa and the golden berberis which strove so gallantly to outdo its neighbours. They vied with each other, rubbing noses, as she used to say, striving to show her that winter was dead, the east wind which her father hated, killed by the west.

She would have gone, as long ago she had, to rub her cheek upon that flame-like rhododendron which was her pride ; but on glancing round she saw Von Schultz approaching and remembered that Jag and Jimmy, who would have understood in some mysterious fashion her mood, had deserted her.

She did not like Carl Schultz. He reminded her of an elongated pumpkin set on two stems with a baby pumpkin, very flaccid and puffy, set on top—which was unfair.

What did the man want ? Why was he coming to disturb her dreams ? Her birds were singing just as they had sung at dawn—blackbird and thrush talking in antiphon ; starlings twittering on eave and chimney-pot ; smoke of the palest ascending straight into blue ether ; the robin's shrill, sweet notes piercing a wrapped world, a world in crimson drapings, hushed and listening, even as Dorothea listened, to the song of spring.

And across that picture came Von Schultz, her father's friend ! He came briskly as a man does who seizes opportunity with both hands and would win.

"What a perfect night for a spin," said he with just that small accentuation of his h-less tongue that was his birthright.

"Sacrilege !" said Dorothea ; but the word that throbbed for utterance was Vandal.

"Oh ! but in the half-light, wiz all flies and things gone

to sleep, is the moment especially gre-ated for motoring—hein ? ”

“ It would drown the song of the birds, Herr Schultz, and that would be hateful.”

Schultz took out a cigarette, tapped it, lighted it and looked up puzzled. “ Always I supposed you loved motoring,” he said quietly.

“ So I do . . . but not when everything is so hushed that you can almost hear the world sigh.” And having said this, Dorothea laughed, a silvery peal that went straight to the heart of the German.

“ I scarcely understand,” he temporized. “ The other day you say you would give your soul for a car like mine, and now ”—he extended his arms with the gesture of his enemies—“ now w'en it is joust perfect for a run you think it imperfect. . . . No—I do not understand.”

“ If you were English it would be plain enough,” Dorothea tossed back, then steadied, remembering this was less than courtesy seemed to demand. “ I am so sorry—no, I did not mean that. I think I meant that perhaps that is one of the differences we find in nations. . . . Their outlook is not the same. . . .”

Schultz evaded the slur and the apology. He laughed good-naturedly, his rather fat laugh, and said, “ Nations, of course, do not all see alike, ozzerweise we should be one people, not many. But at least we are one in love.”

“ In love ? ” Dorothea smiled, unconscious of his trend.

“ So. I put it perhaps badly, but I mean zat at all events we are one in the ability to love.”

“ Perhaps,” Dorothea commented, detached and cold as her father, who was a mathematician, “ though even there I think the races differ enormously.”

“ You think that ? ”

“ Is it not plain, Herr Schultz ? ”

“ I am not sure. How, for instance, is German love different to English ? ”

Dorothea had no two opinions on the question, but she said in a voice which thrilled Von Schultz, “ Are you quite sure you wish me to answer that ? I would rather not, if I may say so.”

“ I wish to know. I am in England. It is good for us to understand the minds of the people with whom we come in

contact . . .” He said this with the German manner that Dorothea found so distasteful.

“Do you think that possible?” she asked.

“I pray it may be so. I think it is the surest way of avoiding what everybody seems to think will presently come.”

“You mean war?”

“Joust that,” he answered, and threw away the cigarette he had been smoking. “We do not wish war to come. We are content with the position as it is. Nothing is to be gained by war between us who, if I may insist, are one people by descent, and who but for the stupidity of certain great men in the past seemed destined to rule the world together. Now, I admit it is less easy. There are influences at work which make it difficult to foresee what may happen . . . and I, when I came to England, decided to seek what difference keeps us apart. . . . You can perhaps explain?”

Dorothea hated war and would do anything in her power to prevent it. Her cousin had died in South Africa. If war came now her two friends would be involved. She looked up in all frankness and said, “No—I’m afraid I can’t help you. It is a question my father could answer better than I can.”

“If you please, I would rather hear it from you. . . .”

She seemed startled by the tone and instantly commenced to move towards the house. “No—I haven’t studied it; yet, actually, I find it difficult to believe we are the same people. I can’t explain it. One would do a thing for the love of it; the other because it might make him rich. It is a question of training from childhood. . . . Sorry. I didn’t mean to say so much, for I don’t know . . . and I should like to go in.”

“At once . . . joust as you make me see things, too?”

“Yes . . . if you don’t mind.”

“I wish first to ask you a question, Miss Nesbit, if I may.”

“Indoors,” she laughed, leading the way.

He overtook her, barred her advance by held-out arms; his eyes slits of dim merriment.

“I have your father’s permission to speak. I have known you a long while, Miss Dorothea”—the name rolled on his tongue as “Dorosea” as he tripped over our song-like consonants—“and for a long time I have wished to ask you to be my wife. I am rich, as you call it here, and some day, when my father dies, I shall be head of the Bank in Germany.”

He caught her hands as she strove to pass.

"May I not tell you that . . . may I not show you that a German can love joust like an Englishman? . . . Will you not permit me to say . . . ?"

Dorothea, flushed and dismayed, gasped out, "My hands, Herr Schultz . . . please, please let go!"

"I wish to prison them always. I wish . . ."

"But I do not!" came with startling clarity on his ears.

"I beg your pardon!" He released her instantly and stood back, watching as she rubbed one wrist upon the other. "I pray, in my eagerness, I did not hurt," he entreated.

She ceased rubbing. "No——"

"Zen why . . . ?"

She did not explain. She stood before him white to the lips, and said, "I am afraid we do not see with the same eyes, Herr Schultz. I am sorry I did not understand sooner. I ought to have guessed why"—her glance took in their arena vacated by all but the gladiators—"why everyone vanished—but I didn't. Believe me, I didn't."

"Of course I believe you." He shot out spluttering words. "If you were to lie, I believe. If you were to say nussing, I believe . . . always, for all the days and nights which come I believe, because I love and beg you . . ."

"No . . . please don't say it. I understand now—but it cannot be. . . ."

"Don't say that," he thrust in swiftly urgent to stop her.

"I must say it—because I do not love you, Herr Schultz. Please let us go in. . . . I am tired."

"I make you love me," he ejaculated, hands lifted in appeal. "I have everyting that make you happy—everysing. . . . Zere is nussing else to do if I live. . . ."

He moved beside her passive enough in spite of the passion she inspired. And as he watched her passing lightly up the terrace he added more quietly:

"I beg you to forgive me that I spoke so suddenly. I beg that you do not remember what you tell me of the difference between German and English love. I beg you to believe that they are one . . . the same for black or white or yellow, the same for English or German—joust, joust exactly the same . . . then some day I come again for my answer."

“No, no. . . . You must not think of that. It is final—quite, quite final.”

“Nussing is final, Fraulein,” he smiled back at her, “in love or war except only—death.”

Then, in great trepidation in spite of her calm exterior, Dorothea made her escape.

CHAPTER III

THE WHIRLWIND

AN Admiralty car wearing no silencer coughed down the drive and drew up with a clang of breaks before Low Willows. She was grey, immense, the embodiment of power, self-contained as an automoton ; so, too, were the movements of the grey-haired man who alighted and pushed the bell. One judged that he also wore no silencer, nothing which in any way would throttle speech.

He walked briskly, in spite of his age, a man of middle height and stiff build, but carrying no burden of flesh. His eyes were hard, his face strong and repellent, clean-shaven, bronzed by years of service. It was the face of one who has won his spurs by fighting, who would fight fairly but to the death. There was a tigerish attitude in the thrust-out head, the bushy eyebrows and general alert poise no years could dim, which would be found on set features when the requiem was said, when ships' companies no longer swore by or at him ; but recognized, as perhaps one day England may, the war-sense and genius of this turbulent son who was gone. Rugged he was, ruthless too, and these adjectives will be wrapped with the legends which will grow up and twine about his name, even as they have about Nelson's, but they will be harder, fiercer, more typical of the speed and giant force of the fleets he handled than were those of the victor of Nile and Trafalgar.

To say more would be to unveil him ; to say less, unjust to one who saw what was wanting and fought for preparation while the Nation and its Leaders cut capers, raced, gamed and played the ostrich with the grace of a duck-billed platypus.

And at this moment he stood before the Nesbits' door, pushing a bell.

No long wait occurred to irritate him, and when the butler appeared, bowing deferentially in the old manner, he had a quip ready and uttered : " Does one good to see that, Williams. Not much of it about in these days for poor men. Family at home ? "

" Yes, Sir Douglas. Will you please come in ? "

" Doubt if you could keep me out, if it came to that. Where shall I find *Him* ? "

" The Master is in the library, sir. . . . If you will allow me . . . "

He stood with lifted hands to give assistance.

" That I still do for myself, Williams. Shall as long as I am able, too—there, coat—cap . . . right—don't hide 'em." He

passed hands lightly over his strong, grey hair. "I shall want them when I go."

"As you wish, sir." Williams took the garments and placed them on an oak settle, advanced and opened the library door. "Admiral Sir Douglas Clancy," he announced, and stood to see him pass.

Mr Nesbit came forward with extended hands. "Delighted to see you, Clancy. I thought you were in the East. It is a long time since you honoured us! Come and get cosy." He drew him towards the fire oblivious of the presence of Mrs Nesbit and Dorothea and the two Haines boys who were struggling to greet him.

"When I have made my salaams to those whom you ignore, my friend—not before. My dear Flora!" He caught her hand and kissed it. "Dorothea! I need not ask how you are. It is written!" He kissed her brow. "This is delightful! How you luxuriate! My heart is at your feet, dear child. Beware how you spurn it. I've been so busy with the broom lately I've had no time to consider beauty. . . ."

They all laughed, standing in a group about the fire, because it was impossible to remain prim under the eyes of one who brimmed vitality.

"You know how glad we are to see you, Douglas, and how we quake when we recollect the perils you face," said Mrs Nesbit.

"Perils? Nonsense! Never came across any in my life. . . . No, I was not in the East. Mediterranean, Malta, Cyprus, b'gad! is about my limit to-day. Got to drive folk. . . . Wish it were otherwise. . . . And who are your friends . . . or are they yours, my lady of the splendid years?" This to Dorothea who stood beside them.

"Mine and mother's, too, if you please. . . . Jimmy Haines you have met before—when he was at Dartmouth, you remember. . . ."

"Navy. Thought so. Can't mistake the breed. What's the position, eh?" He shook hands.

"Sub-lieutenant, sir—H.M.S. *Indomitable*," said Jimmy Haines.

"One of the New Testaments,¹ eh? Good! Keep close at it. She's worth a lot to those who know how to use her." He turned to the elder Haines. "You, too, seem familiar—Service?"

¹ Nickname for the battle-cruiser of 1914 as distinct from those of the Old Testament brand which came before.

"Merchant, sir."

"Hum! I wondered. Didn't quite seem to place you. Pity we can't amalgamate. You'll have to do without guns when it comes. Thank your Government for that—not me. You'll be wanted, too; wanted when we come to hold the ring. Why in God's name aren't you in the Service with your brother?"

"I went first, sir, and was in too great a hurry to get afloat, I think. Besides, I don't fancy my father could have stood the strain for two."

"Yes. I see that. Well, you will be wanted, if I can read signs which most people refuse to read. Good God!" He stumped across, pushing out arms and ruffling, if that were possible, his close-cropped hair, fell into a chair and sat with toes outstretched to the blaze. "Luxuries, eh? Presently they will be hard to come by. Enjoy them while you can—Nesbit, I envy you."

"The whole truth, I believe, is that you know I envy you, my friend."

"Of course. We all do while things are quiet and the shining armour remains in dust-sheets."

"I have my work, so has my wife and Dorothea—otherwise perhaps we might envy you more. Yes, I think that is possible . . . but one's work is absorbing. There are always possibilities. One might discover a new world, for instance, and become famous."

"Better become infamous—if you look for adulation," came grimly from the tight lips.

"I spoke of a new world," Nesbit laughed.

"B'gad! We want one. . . . Look here, Nesbit, I have just come from watching the end of an old church . . . burnt by our hoydens! You aren't one of them, are you, Dorothea?"

She shook that off, smiling, radiant in her beautiful youth.

"No—not now."

"Does that mean you are with them in spirit?"

"I think not. No—I don't approve of arson."

"Or breaking windows to get at the moon. Thank God for that, anyway! It is a concession. Mind! I am an old man who has seen service; but I give you my word I felt like a fool in face of that blazing church. God's house, mind! What good end was served? Anyone's toothache cured? Anyone found a new road to the Millennium through the flames? God's word! It makes me wrath. It makes me unfit for the society of anyone

but myself. . . ." He got up and stormed across the room. "For we are on the brink . . . can't tell you much, but I tell you *that*; and our women are burning churches and smashing the windows of peace-loving tradesmen. Caterwauling!" He threw out the last word with biting scorn.

"The provocation has been very great," Mrs Nesbit suggested and paused at the twist he made.

"Provocation to what—to burn churches? Surely you don't mean me to understand that you uphold that . . ." He turned blazing to face her, halting in his march, flustered.

"No, no; but we can't hide from ourselves the fact that there have been promises—promises made by great statesmen who have gone out of their way to let us down. Who never intended to do what they said they would do. . . . It is unforgivable."

"What else do you expect from politicians? Pst! And so you burn churches and smash windows in retaliation! *Lex talionis*, eh? Tut-tut! Sophism pure and simple. The Lord will scarcely know His Own!" He turned to Jimmy Haines and said with a burst of merriment—"What would you do with a bluejacket who smashed the scuttles because he wanted a bigger ration of jam?"

"Full penalty, C.B., sir."

"And he would come off light. . . ." He turned to Jag, "And you, sir?" he questioned.

"Shoot him if I had my way, sir."

"And as you haven't?" came crisply from the Admiral.

"Call in a magistrate and get him to do his worst."

"Right—that's about your limit in the Merchant Service. In my time we would have blown him from a gun. Serve the beggar right, too—but we," he accentuated the pronoun, "put our criminals in prison, give them doctors and nurses and thermogene pads; find them billiard-tables and bowling-greens and eau-de-Cologne for their baths—then, if they sulk, refuse to eat or be doctored turn them adrift and say, 'Be good or I'll smack you!' Asinine!" He came back and sat down spluttering. "Smack 'em first an' tell 'em you've done it after," he said with immense gusto. "Tell 'em that next time you'll use the cat—and use it. After that give 'em a looking-glass and tell 'em to work or sit down and watch themselves starve. . . ."

"I'm glad for the sake of our misguided women you are not in power, Admiral. . . ."

"Are you? B'gad, my dear Mrs Nesbit—are you? I tell you this—in a very little while the boot will be on the other foot and you will be prayin'—prayin', madam, to your God for a man who can rule . . . not a pulin', lawyer-politician without vision or belief or any other damned faculty under Heaven bar words. They may call for me! I wish to God I was on the bridge to-day, I would show them how to rule. . . ."

Again he was on his feet walking up and down, shouting out words and phrases that stung.

"You can't rule if you are afraid of the mob. You can't rule if you are always stopping to count votes. You can't rule if you have been playin' to the mob, got them on their hind legs, b'gad! And presently, for some hidden cause, have to hold your hand and tell them to get down. You can't promise and forget, as they say, to 'produce the goods'—long. You can't juggle with the King's name and pretend you have veneration for his laws—twice. You can't tell the people there's no God, and when they stay away from church damn them for a lot of silly galoots—unless you are a genius, a Cromwell, a Nelson, a Luther, and all the world knows it. . . . And if you try it you'll just come a cropper an' lie rolling in the muck you've stirred. . . . Remember that when you're hit . . .

"Look you, Jupiter, my friend—if I were at the Admiralty to-day I should do things. If I were at the War Office I should do things. It would raise a howl from a certain class. I would clap the howlers in jail, and if they chose to starve they might starve and be damned to them! If I were in any sort of Government office to-day I should act, not talk; prepare, not send olive branches to The Hague; clean my guns and get out the grindstones for sharpening bayonets. . . . Oh! I should be very busy with all the paraphernalia of battle and murder and sudden death. . . . I'd grow mines on trees and hatch submarines in incubators. Flying machines would roar in our ears, and the drone of Babel would deafen us as factories sprang from the ground. Factories where munitions could be made. I would ring in our ships, ring in our men, perfect one or two systems of wireless I know, bring out the listening machines we'll all pray for presently and won't find to our hand . . . an' I'd be tired every night, ready to drop; but, please God, I'd be gettin' things done, not talkin' of them . . . getting my boys in touch with events, not cackling like a bunch of old hens at the side of a roost."

He came back from the far side of the room and held out his hand.

"Can't stop, my dear coz," he laughed, while they all stared. "I've been cackling, too. But don't think I came here to frighten you. You know my way when I'm stirred and are kind enough to overlook my phrasing. I don't mince words. I say what I think in the only language I know. I learned it at sea and find it efficacious. I wish others used it. We are on the brink of all sorts of things—some of them exceedingly unpleasant to consider—and I must get along. I am due at the Admiralty in an hour. God bless you all. Sleep well . . . it's about all you can do at the moment." He shook hands and turned to his host. "A word in private," he said quietly; "then I must go."

Nesbit accompanied him and they crossed to a room at the far side of the hall, entered and closed the door.

"I was running past your gate," he commenced at once, "when I saw a car turn out of your drive . . . Schultz, wasn't it?"

"Very likely. He was here an hour ago."

"May I ask what he was doing, or rather, if I may put it so, what you were doing to permit it?"

"Certainly. We are friends—that is to say, we have known him for a couple of years. Why not?"

"Carl Schultz—the head of the Swiss bank in London?"

"Yes . . . er . . . I don't see what you are driving at. Why should we not see him?"

"Because he's a damned German. Because he is busy getting hold of British gold—stocks, shares, anything worth money—and passing it on to Germany."

Nesbit waited, silent for a moment; but the Admiral refused to be drawn further until he was sure.

"I don't understand quite what you mean," Nesbit objected. "The man is a banker. It seems to be the sort of thing bankers do. I don't pretend to understand markets and Stock Exchange transactions, but if these people are buying English securities . . ."

"Getting them transferred to German Stocks, my friend," Sir Douglas interposed, wagging a finger in air.

"I know nothing of that. Is it criminal?"

"May I ask a plain question of you . . . a question you might consider damned impertinent from a stranger, which I am not?"

"Certainly you may."

"Good! Then has this man proposed to transfer Stocks you hold in England to his German father's bank?"

"Well—in a way he has suggested it. Why not, if they are better investments?"

"But are they?"

"I leave that to my lawyers."

"Good again. Then I take it nothing has been done?"

"Nothing. I have promised to consider it only."

"Capital! Then write and say you have done so and you refuse."

"Why not leave it to my lawyers?"

"Have you consulted them?"

"Not yet."

"Then don't do so . . . why not? Good God! because I tell you you will lose your money if you do. You know me. You understand I am behind the scenes. You may guess what you will . . . but, look here, Nesbit, I'm going a bit out of my way to do you a good turn—to save you, if you care to put it so, but I can tell you no more. My data are my own. I seldom permit myself the pleasure of saying what is going on. Take my word or leave it . . . only, for Heaven's sake think of that dear girl of yours and don't saddle me with a burden I can't carry. That's for your pipe, old friend, and God be with us all. We shall want Him."

"Why especially at this juncture?"

"Because no one else can save us from our lawgivers."

"I confess," Nesbit fumed with due shame, "I'm very much in the dark, and . . ."

"So are we at this moment—all of us. I'm considering the effect of this new-fangled Declaration of ours—The Declaration of London."

"But surely the House of Lords threw that out? I have no notion what it was about, still . . ."

"Nor have we . . . except that it will hamstring the Services—*All the Services*, if . . ."—he glanced about, saw no one, yet added in a whisper—"if we happen to be at war . . . for on my soul I believe they would enforce it."

He was gone with the phrase, finger on lips, satiric; and Williams, scandalized but sedate, announced in the servants' hall the passing of a whirlwind.

CHAPTER IV

CROSSING THE BAR

CONVERSATION scarcely flourished after Nesbit's return to the library. When he came in Dorothea alone of the quartette seemed lively, and her eyes shone over cheeks which were flushed. Nesbit wondered whether that were the result of the Schultz interview, or whether Clancy had been too outspoken. He did not like excitement. Household cares, in common with the Nation's, never came his way. They were kept at a distance in order that his mind should be clear for the discovery of that world which he had hinted might fall to his bow.

One cannot walk with the stars and keep step with mortals on Mother Earth without tripping in one sphere. Therefore Mrs Nesbit accepted the cares. Nesbit did not sit on entering the room, but stood reading his young friends very much as a dominie seeks to read his flock. Then he said, "This is very interesting," and left his wife to provide the inference.

"Your father means," she announced with the essential smile, "that Sir Douglas has thrown a bombshell which has disturbed his atmosphere." Then, turning to him, she added, "Is the matter you have in hand so urgent, dear, that you cannot spare an hour?"

"Unfortunately it is both urgent and abstruse. All study is abstruse. Disturbance is fatal to concentration."

"Concentrate on something else, Dad," Dorothea interjected. "I'm tired of the old stars."

"Fortunately for you and for the world at large, I do not share your fatigue," he smiled back.

"But he said we were on the brink—the brink of what?"

"Lunacy, my dear . . . but I would rather not discuss a subject in which I am not versed. Admiral Clancy was plain."

"But I love to," she objected.

"I am aware of it. *Aut Cæsar aut nullus*—you live on the surface, if I may put it so, while I live in the deeps." He searched the eyes he was anxious to read. Dorothea met him with a flash of merriment.

"I hate the deeps, they are always slimy," she laughed.

"Out of the slime man was born"—he nodded gravely, reading his answer—"and we who walk in the light, love, marry and find sons to succeed us."

"And sometimes discover daughters who smile and try to

persuade us that the slime happened so long ago that it does not count against love and youth."

He watched her eyes. They were steady. She laughed in spite of that, and he turned gravely away. "I have my answer," he said. "Now I am going to my post. Good night."

He did not seem sorry that he had read what he had read. The alternative might have been more troublesome in the future—if what Clancy foreshadowed came about. He refused to think of that, but ascended to the domed tower that crowned one wing of his house and settled down to consider the march of a world through space.

He watched till midnight, then a curious hum far up among the stars he noted attracted his attention. At first he pushed it away, as was his custom; but the sound increased sensibly until suddenly he was confronted with something unusual and must discover its meaning. Earth tremors he understood—but the earth slept; the seismograph gave notice of no marked vibration. Thunder he understood, magnetic storms of all degree—but this was of neither species. It was continuous. It advanced from an eastern quarter where the sky was clear and each sector could be swept in turn. Then came a swift series of flashes—little pin-point gleams of varying duration very singular to consider. Then after a brief space there appeared another series—gleams like the first, but more distant, perhaps in answer!

A mile from Low Willows and its astronomer lord, two others saw the pin-points and instantly stopped their car. These young men were moderns, versed in signals. They began to spell out letters:

"*D-e-u-t-s-c-h w-a-s h-o-r-e-n k-r-i-e-g A-u-s-t-r-i-c-h d-a-s m-a-n-n . . .*" said Jimmy slowly, "end of sentence apparently. What does it spell?"

Jag, with his cuff for a tablet, scanned the words and answered at once, "German. No sense at all. Probably cypher. Let's get on."

"Listen!" Jimmy cried. "Hear that?" The noise of their motor had stifled it—now it was plain.

"Airship," said Jag.

"Airships," Jimmy corrected. "German airships talking shop over Cranwood Common. 'What d'you make of that?'"

"Cheek!" said Jag.

"Like the blighters' impudence," Jimmy admitted. "Gee!

I'm sleepy. I'd ring up the Whirlwind if I knew where he was."

And in his eyrie Nesbit, who could read nothing in Morse, and only knew that Morse was used by operators tapping out telegrams, questioned whether it would not be well to send a message in the morning to let Sir Douglas know what had happened. And when he had noted that, he turned his attention once more to the point in space which chained him. He knew nothing of airships beyond the fact that they existed and sometimes moved more or less hazardously from one place to another; but that these were German airships, searching out tracks, experimenting for raids and marking on a chart the way they would come when the hour struck, he would have denounced as chimera.

In the morning he decided there was no necessity to send to Sir Douglas. The papers announced the visitation in bold type, and some commented on the apparent freedom with which alien air fleets moved over England, adding thrusts which should have stirred the dead. But Jupiter Nesbit stirred his coffee, turned the page and skimmed his *Times* as all men do who have spent the morning in bed after a night on duty.

Now Jimmy and Jag Haines were less happy, or perhaps one should say less buoyant, to-day than yesterday. In some mysterious fashion each had discovered that Schultz was dangerous, and they were oppressed by the knowledge. Until Schultz appeared on the scene neither Jag nor Jimmy had been at the trouble of analysing feelings which were new and strange. Sailors are rarely analytical. Dorothea was Dorothea, their pal; one to be obeyed, thwarted, loved, laughed at, as the spirit moved them. Had it not been so always? Would it not as certainly continue? Why should there be any sort of change?

Of course, they saw now that this was not the whole case. One only had to set it out in terms, and the matter was plain. Dorothea was of a marriageable age. A blind man could have told them that. It was possible Dorothea might be considering marriage—perhaps to that German blighter, as Jimmy phrased it deep in his soul; or, as Jag put it, to that "Dutchman." And each of them asked in the silence which came of these considerations, whether *that* would be endurable?

From this stage they advanced insensibly and without premeditation to the proposition—what should I do if Dorothea really did marry some other blighter? The idea was new and

the novelty of it rather flustering to men who, under less risky conditions, would not have thought of tying the girl down until they were able to offer her comfort as well as marriage. But yesterday they had seen what they had seen. Manœuvred off, by Jove! Made to give way to that Schultz fellow! Passed from the terrace by old Nesbit to get a drink, under the Dutchman's eyes, by the Lord! That really did put the lid on—just when Dorothea had promised, each of them in turn, to go for a stroll after dinner. The lid? Well—what would *you* call it? Of course, there was no terrace that night . . . and—and Dorothea's eyes gave away the secret she thought she had left hid in her room.

The girl was very loyal. Had she been questioned at this stage, she would without doubt have said she loved both boys; but had she questioned her own heart quietly, as she had just now after Carl Schultz had dared to propose, she would have acknowledged a leaning towards Jag. Jag was the elder by two or three years. He had a less boisterous vitality, a soberness born of his calling, which was less ruled and defined than his brother's; but for the rest there was little to choose between the two either in build or appearance. In plain dress either would have passed for an officer; but in uniform Jimmy would have scored, and he knew it.

That, perhaps, was the secret which governed Dorothea in her attitude towards the two. Jag suffered to some extent from Jimmy's outspoken criticism of the Merchant Service; of its uniform, which even Jag was compelled to admit was a livery, and of its wicked assumption of the naval curl. Pin-pricks, you perceive, just as Dorothea did, thrown out in badinage, not with intent—for at that time the question of jealousy had not entered the mind of either.

To-day, however, things were less easy. After the Schultz stupidity had come old Whirlwind with all sorts of obscurations. Finally, those airships cruising over Cranwood spluttering their damned gutturals in good English air. No wonder the outlook was darkened, their hearts sore, their minds perplexed. The world was crumbling from under their feet. Even Dorothea appeared less real, but at the same time infinitely more desirable. If war came the Navy would be busy—Jimmy had no doubt on that head. If the Nation was to be fed, the Merchant Service would be busy too. Who could doubt it, seeing we possessed no

store of food, no granaries, but were content to live as the sparrows ?

Jag decided, after breakfast and a short chat with his father, to go to Town for his investigations ; Jimmy hired what he called a motor-bike and throbbed noisily to Portsmouth to see what he could learn.

It is not easy to say at what definite moment the brothers recognized the trend of events ; yet the time came when the knowledge flashed out. They were rivals. Henceforth they must be engaged in a species of warfare ; alert, ready to strike at the root of that boyish trust and comradeship which each had experienced at the hands of the other. That was hateful ! It might end in commonplace or in an antagonism prolonged and made more bitter by time ; yet they knew that these things are with Joss, the watchful and omnipresent God of all sailors.

That failed to make it easy. They knew that Joss helps those who help themselves, and decided during the hours they spent apart, the one on a motor-cycle, the other in Town, to work for decision. You see, the Schultz affair really had opened their eyes. They could not conceive Dorothea married to that German. Was she not theirs ? Would not one of them win ? They had her smiles, her praise and blame, now pretty equally and in lavish sort ; but that was not enough. One of them must win, if only to keep her from suitors who seemed to throng in now, threatening her peace on every hand.

Each saw how it was with the other ; saw the complications which must arise, the heartbreak which must be the portion of the one who failed, and hated the thought of providing that heartbreak. They required time to solve their problem.

Jag had qualms, you may be sure, as he marched the streets striving to find out what lay behind Sir Douglas' warning ; but they were not of the Admiral's making. Dorothea was at the heart of his trouble, even as she was at the heart of his brother's. He ached to get the thing decided, and planned his opening as he moved past shipping offices in Leadenhall Street. He would say quite casually to Jimmy, " Oh, by the way . . ." And here he paused, revolving the matter from another point. Would it not be wiser to say nothing—sail, and leave the field to Jimmy ? Quixotic ? Of course. But when was youth endowed with the selfishness and cynicism of age ?

For a moment Jag thrilled over this, then pushed it aside. No—that would not do. It would not be fair to Dorothea. He put it so, having, as one should see, no knowledge of the personal equation, nor anything more flustering than the sight of Dorothea with tears in her eyes. After that he became quite calm and was able to take pleasure in his favourite shop-window over there crammed with pictures at the heart of the traffic.

Jimmy, during his ride to Portsmouth and back, was afflicted in the same way. He discovered no reason for alarm; everywhere content, placid, beautiful content; England in her hey-day! England basking, asleep after her forty years' peace . . . but he remembered that Jag was always the white-haired boy with Dorothea. He did not seek the reason why. Enough that it was plain. Why, he only had to remember how she seemed to pity Jag because he was not in the Navy. So like Dorothea that. Always concerned in some other fellow's welfare . . . as though that mattered while she remained happy.

He remembered, too, one instance in particular. He, Jimmy, had been swaggering, as boys will, with the newly won white patch on his collar, which marked him as a fully fledged missel-thrush escaped from a midshipman's flat, when some one asked Jag why he did not wear his uniform also. For you see these folk lived in a town remote from sea influences, and gathered at the feet of uniform whenever it deigned to spread itself on downs or in street. Jag made some reply, Jimmy scarcely recalled what, which brought from him the retort, "It's not a uniform—it's a livery. Ask him." And he remembered Jag's face. Perhaps he remembered more plainly, as he pounded back from the naval seaport, Dorothea's swift scorn and the battle royal which ensued.

Poor little girl! Jimmy loved to see her flash. Her eyes had the knack. They could strike sparks just as her comb struck sparks when she used it in the dark. Perhaps that was the reason why Jimmy watched his chance to draw fire.

Jimmy considered this and similar incidents with diminishing hope as he rode. He admitted they were bad form . . . but, at the time, it had been great sport. To watch Dorothea and Jag had always been sport . . . now, he knew quite well, it would not be sport. And so all through the long ride memories thronged of how Jag had always come out on top, even when he scarcely appeared to wish for success; how Dorothea was always his champion, and how slow Jag had been to profit by it.

That was awfully white of Jag. Maybe it was a foretaste of

what would occur now if . . . if Jimmy decided to draw near and ask Dorothea to be his wife. . . .

God ! How his pulses thrilled at the notion. He had never thought of it in that way before, never come in touch with blood force, never dreamed of it. His face was scarlet, his lips apart, his eyes fixed, smiling, happy, expectant . . . Dorothea ! Thought alone had produced this ecstasy . . . what else remained ?

The cycle swerved damnably towards a bank as Jimmy reached this conclusion. He applied the brakes, shut off his engine—all automatically—instantly, and got back to his track. He recognized in that moment he had been dreaming, thinking new thoughts, by George ! Playing with a life which belonged to his Majesty, if he knew anything of Regulations as expounded in the Navy. He was young, you see—twenty-three in a month—and very impressionable, rather fagged after his long run ; rather down on his luck, as he would have expressed it, and on the verge of self-pity.

That was rotten. A man who goes in for that kind of thing is lost. Generally he gets spun for a waster, and Jimmy scarcely saw himself in that galley, you may be sure. For had he not graduated in the cocksure mill of Osborne and Dartmouth and learned his lesson as they all do who are of the Navy—*ab ovo* ? Jacky Fisher had seen to that.

He came up Dorking High Street with throttled engine, left the “ bike ” and turned swiftly to the Rectory. He was late. Jag would be in, dinner half over. No matter. He had taken hold of the reins. . . . Jag and he would have it out over a pipe.

They did.

It happened in this wise.

When the Rector had gone to his study and Mrs Haines was dozing over her knitting, Jimmy rose and stretched without shame.

“ I feel like a walk,” he announced. “ Care to join ? ”

Jag rose too.

“ For half an hour—yes. I’m nearly walked to a standstill.”

“ I’m biked stiff,” said Jimmy.

“ Wouldn’t be seen dead on one,” Jag tossed back.

“ They get you about,” Jimmy smiled. “ Find out anything in Town ? ”

“ Not a word. Did you ? ”

“ Blank. Portsmouth’s asleep.”

"That ought to be good hearing?"

"Never know . . . they're as downy as you make 'em, at the Centres."

The conversation waned. They moved out of the grounds and fell into step on the road. The night was brilliant; a full moon masking the stars.

"Where shall we go?" asked Jimmy.

"Oh—any old where . . . cross the links."

"Right-o!"

Again they walked. Jimmy lighted a pipe. Jag followed suit. They walked smoking in silence. "Any old where!" How à propos that was of their mood!

Jimmy fathomed the depths lying behind that answer as surely as a practised juggler catches the ball he has thrown. So—Jag was alive to the facts. Gad! They stuck out enough to trip any sane man. A mere question of you or me, my friend, with coffee for one in the background. Damn!

Jimmy's pipe had gone out. The brothers halted. Jag struck a match, held it, and Jimmy relighted. Jag puffed steadily until they reached that part of Chart Lane at which a man may mount barriers. They climbed a fence and passed on until they reached giant trees wilfully grown to obstruct a good drive. Beyond lay a green marked by its flag and shimmering in the moon glare.

Jag halted and removed his pipe. "What are we going to do?" he asked as a man does whose pulses are throbbing.

"What do you suggest?" Jimmy tossed back, quiet because of the note he caught.

"Be hung if I know," Jag answered; "thought perhaps your bike might have jerked some notion out of you on that ride you took."

"If it did I sailed past it," said Jimmy, leaving the ball in play.

"Pity," Jag clicked, swallowed, blew a cloud of smoke and added: "Suppose we leave it to her?"

Neither, you perceive, had mentioned Dorothea's name nor apologized for the abrupt handling of a theme on which every player is supposed to be blind. If Jimmy were afflicted in this way, his eyes seemed particularly alert—they sparked, as he would have said. If Jag, then it was strange to recognize the force that burned in them. They were as chary of words as men are chary of striking matches in a powder vault. Both maintained silence for a space on Jag's suggestion. They puffed at

pipes which seemed to need holding and the expenditure of many matches to keep them burning.

At last Jimmy thrust out a feeler. "Oh, but she can't do that. . . . She would never say anything . . . besides, she'd have to wait for Leap Year or something equally futile."

Again Jag swallowed smoke : this time nicotine accompanied it. He jerked the stem of his pipe to and fro, spluttered and said quite quietly, "Oh, well . . . you sail in and . . . and try your luck."

Jimmy's eyes made play here from what he would have called a "canted phiz"; that is to say an up-from-under look, chin tilted somewhat and at an angle.

"No," he announced. "I can't do that."

"Then what do you suggest?" Jag asked swiftly. "Can't prolong this kind of thing, what?"

"Toss for place," said Jimmy. "Leave it to Joss."

"Let's walk on that," Jag made answer, and the pair set out smoking like chimneys towards the club-house. But they did not enter it. There were lights within, thirsty men fighting, over pegs, the story of how he or they sliced or pulled, or used a cleek instead of a mashie and so spoiled a round which otherwise would have constituted a record. Dull stuff, all of it, to men embroiled in the battle of life. The two turned, making for Punchbowl Lane, crossed a stile and stood in the shadow of great trees.

"Well?" said Jag.

Jimmy shook his head. "There's nothing else that I can see."

"Same here," Jag admitted.

They moved towards a clearing and Jimmy produced a coin.

"Silver," he chuckled. "That will shine up like a dollar in a darky's eye. We toss," he explained in less stilted English "for the right to be the first to see her." Then, with a twist, "What shall it be—sudden death?"

"Right."

"You call," said Jimmy, and the coin went high.

"Heads," said Jag.

It fell to earth, and they moved forward craning over it.

"It's yours," said Jimmy.

He picked up the coin and pocketed it without further comment. They refilled and lighted their pipes as they walked. They returned through a bypath to the Rectory as the clock struck nine.

In the hall they stood a moment beside an old oak chest where candlesticks and brasses were set out in prim array. They stood

for a few minutes fingering the candles, elbows nearly touching, eyes steadfast on vacancy ; then Jag's hand fell.

Of the twain Jimmy was the calmer now. He noticed that Jag did not take up his candle, but looked swiftly at the clock ticking out time in its corner. He knew that it is the winner always who feels the hot blood coursing, whether the stakes be woman or gold ; the winner who is at a disadvantage, the bridegroom who stutters out commonplaces in the silliest speech of his life ; otherwise how would he show his glory ? Jimmy would have distrusted a man who was coherent with a bride at his side. Jag would have scarified him.

But here was no win—only the decision given by the spin of a coin ; only the right to put a question first . . . to receive an answer first . . . perhaps to be turned down, as they phrased it, first also.

In spite of the tension Jimmy felt this and leaned a trifle over the banisters as he went up, to whisper :

“ When will you see her ? ”

“ To-night, if I can.”

“ How ? ”

“ Don't know. I shall take a cycle—your bike, if I can—to get there.”

“ Oh ! ” said Jimmy.

He reflected as he mounted the stairs that for once he had passed an opening for repartee which should count to his credit, if ever anything was set to the credit of a miserable blighter who had lost his one and only chance of winning happiness.

For Jimmy had no illusions.

CHAPTER V

MOONLIGHT

LOW WILLOWS, when dinner was over and the Master gone to his vigil, usually was quiet as are other households where men are engaged on Science or the Arts. Nesbit knew nothing of any law bidding him cease work at the blast of a horn. Eight hours had no meaning for him, six or seven still less. More often his day approached fourteen hours, for he was governed by mood and the knowledge that he had perhaps advanced a stage.

At this hour the ladies of the house had recourse to books or music when no guests were present; but to-night Dorothea decided to talk. It was the first opportunity she had found to discover her mother's views on certain matters which troubled her. Since the Schultz affair she had indulged in the horrible feeling that she had disappointed her parents, and now she was feeling the strain. Twenty-four hours was rather a long time to give to what she called "bottled emotions," yet it had happened. When therefore her father had gone rather more silently than usual, and without his good-night kiss, to his observatory, she crossed the drawing-room, settled her mother in a favourite chair and, leaning one elbow on the mantelpiece, said, "What has happened to Dad to-night, I wonder?"

Mrs Nesbit placed her book on her lap and took off her folders. "I think he is worried by what Sir Douglas said last night, dear. He was greatly interrupted, too, by that singular affair which you see mentioned in the *Morning Post* . . . those airships, you remember, which passed quite near us. Dad says he saw the flashes which the paper warns us were signals, and he is disturbed by the construction put on it by the *Post*."

"What construction, *ma mie*?"

"War, dear child."

"Oh, I am rather tired of that. It has been going on for years. You are positive it has nothing to do with my refusal of Herr Schultz?"

Mrs Nesbit looked up, startled by the tone, and saw Dorothea's face slowly crimsoning with the words. She leaned forward, her book forgotten. "Surely you know us better than that . . . you understand we are in no hurry to lose you, Doretta?"

"You, yes . . . but—mother! I can't help it—what about Dad?"

"You distress yourself and me unnecessarily, dear. That

sounds cold. . . . I don't mean it. I am sure he breathed more freely when I told him the result."

"I am glad of that," Dorothea said swiftly. "I should hate to disappoint him—or—to think he wished me to marry that man. I wouldn't, if he were the only man in the world. I dislike Germany—and—and I don't trust Herr Schultz."

She came over and kneeled beside her mother, putting her arms about her, her cheek against hers. "Sure he didn't want it . . . quite—quite sure?"

"Absolutely."

"And you . . . neither of you—want me to marry anyone, unless I—I like him too awfully for words?" she shot out and buried a face which was scarlet.

"Of course we do not, my dear. Why, have we given you that impression?"

"No, no. Only I wondered if, for instance, it had been somebody . . ."

"Who?" Mrs Nesbit questioned, seeking her eyes.

"Or if you would rather I stayed with you always . . . we are very comfy as we are, you know," she countered.

"Yes," Mrs Nesbit conceded.

"And—oh, well . . . supposing somebody had asked, and it had mattered very much to me; would you rather I sent him away, or—or . . ."

"Wouldn't it depend very much on whether you loved him, Doretta?"

"Of course."

Full stop when in full tide, the girl's eyes soft, looking far into the past, perhaps into the future, while her mother sat still remembering always she had hoped Dorothea would fall in love with Jimmy. Of the two she preferred Jag—it was his Service she resented. Indeed, Mrs Nesbit had very little knowledge of ships; but she could recall Dorothea's pleading long ago to see Jag's sailors, her description when she returned from a visit to the docks—"Ragged and dirty, Mummie . . . oh! so different to Jimmy's men. And the *holes* they live in! Jag called them that, and they were. . . ." She remembered, too, Ruskin's damning statement—"An ordinary clever and sensible seaman will be able to make his way ashore at most ports; yet he has only to speak a sentence of any language to be known for an illiterate person"—and Dorothea's outburst when her father quoted it.

"Who is it, my dear?" she asked again.

"Who is what, *ma mie*?"

"Who has asked you to marry him since you refused Herr Schultz?"

"No one. . . . Only been asked once . . . never will be again . . . for ever and ever, Amen."

"Hum!" said Mrs Nesbit, "I wonder which of them it is?"

Dorothea did not seem to hear. She was looking over the back of her mother's chair at the moonlight which rippled on the lawn, touched the rhododendrons and glazed the whole scene a wondrous blue. Mrs Nesbit pressed her question, adding, "Don't tell me if you would rather not do so."

To this Dorothea replied, "Would it make any difference?"

"To me, dear, no . . . but to Dad there would be . . ."

Dorothea refused to hear. "No, no, no!" she sang, then clung trembling betwixt laughter and tears—her eyes wet. "I had no right to ask that, *ma mie*! Forgive me! No one has said anything. Why should they? . . . And if anyone did, if it were not the right one I should say, No—just as I did to Herr Schultz. I have had practise," she laughed out, "and know the signs now. I shouldn't let him go on as I did yesterday. . . . And you had cleared the ground for him! I thought all sorts of things. . . . I was frightened. . . . You see, I hadn't dreamt of it, and—and it seemed like sacrilege to be listening—only I didn't know how to stop him. He was so"—she searched for a word—" *au fait*. The great man. 'My fazer is head of ze Zwiss bank,' " she mimicked, head in air. "'W'en 'ee is dead I shall be wot you call riche!' Fancy me marrying a man who murders our beautiful English! It would grate on my ears every moment of the day. Hateful! Why am I talking of it I wonder? Dad would say because women use their tongues where men use brains. It was quite stupid, of course. I mean he did not make me *feel*. He might have been a gramophone. . . . All the same, I wished I could stop my ears . . . you understand that?"

"Quite well, my dear."

"And it wasn't abnormal, or anything?"

"I think you were very brave to stand your ground. I am glad I never was so tried."

"Was it horrid when Dad asked you, I wonder?" she asked gently.

"No—a delight!"

"You didn't mind my asking that, did you? I am glad it was

beautiful. I should want it to be beautiful, too, something I could remember for ever and ever, you know—when I got quite old. Like marriage. . . .”

She rose from her knees as swiftly as she had kneeled, patted her hair, which was ordered in spite of her abandon, and said :

“ Now I must go and get tidy—and you must go on with your book. I have been chattering, haven’t I ? Quite an opening for Dad, if he had heard, to tell me what Carlyle or somebody said about thinking. So I will go away—and I don’t fancy I shall come down again. Do you mind ? ”

“ I want to see you happy,” said Mrs Nesbit, her arms clasped about the girl’s waist.

“ Oh ! but I am,” said Dorothea. Then with a swift caress she made her escape.

And as she entered what she called her den, a room adjoining her bedroom, a soft whistle sounded from among the shrubs beside the lawn. Just two mellow notes true to the diatonic fourth, which might have come from a blackbird’s throat, so liquid were they, so pleading.

Dorothea took no space for thought. She quickly switched off the light, for the blinds were not yet drawn, and went to the open French window to look out. The notes were repeated ; then a series of flashes, some short, some long, came from a position deep among the shrubs, and she recrossed to her electric switch. This she touched four times, giving alternately two long and two short illuminations of the room, and again stood by the window. Without was a deep balcony with railings upon which rose tendrils climbed forming a barrier over which she peered.

A moment later came a series of flashes given with a torch which Dorothea watched with lips apart, her eyes wide, her breath coming swiftly as though she gasped.

Short, long, long, long ; short, long ; long, long, short. That was the sequence. Her lips formed a name—Jag—in a whisper ; then she returned to her switch. Again, four times, the window flashed light. After that no further signal appeared. Dorothea closed her door and passed down the corridor glancing at her watch. Half-past nine. After all, the servants were not yet in . . . why not ? She scarcely halted, found a cloak, pulled up its hood and stepped outside. The door she left on the latch.

She moved down the drive a little distance, then turned sharply

to the left beneath trees where the path was barred by the shadows of trunks and branches which swayed across the stones.

She came to the edge of the copse and paused, searching the moonlit grounds. A figure appeared, drew near, and in a moment she was advancing to meet it. A nightjar's hoarse cry rang out as they moved.

"Jag!" she called, a new thrill on the name. Then swiftly: "Why didn't you warn me? . . . I had nearly forgotten the answer."

"I had no time," said he. "I came on the spur of the moment, praying for luck. I had to come or stifle. . . ."

"Stifle—why?"

"May we walk?" he begged. "Can you come down there by the balustrade?—you know where. . . . I—I want to talk. May we?"

"Of course—why not? . . . Oh! that bird. . . ."

"You are my Queen," he whispered. "You always give me my desire and ask me why not after. . . ."

"If you are going to criticize and be rude," she smiled, "I shall be sorry I came."

"No, no! Please don't say that. I am all a-yaw to-night and couldn't stand chaff."

"All what?"

"Jumpy," said he.

"You jumpy? Nonsense! You couldn't be now you are a captain."

"It depends," said Jag Haines with a deliberation which belied him, "on who I have to face, and—and what?"

"I—I don't understand," said Dorothea, and they walked on.

By chance, as they moved side by side, their shoulders touched. They were so nearly of one height that the shadows they threw reached the path as one, not two—yet in a moment two sentences passed.

"I beg your pardon," said Jag.

"It was my fault," Dorothea smiled.

They came to the balustrade without further mishap—and in silence.

Speech scarcely seemed essential while they walked; but when they stood still and Dorothea threw back her hood and faced the moon, a thrill ran through young Haines. He drew breath sharply. It was as though he said, "God!" in prayer, as sailors do.

He looked into her eyes and saw the moonbeams gleaming there—softened, beautiful, shy, glad—all in a flash. He saw the dark hair he had so often pulled down and rubbed in tangled disarray about her eyes, and found it splendid, lighted near her ear and neck by the moon. He saw the curve of lips which had snapped out criticism as well as approval ; which had rung with anger, coquetry, pleading, defiance, in helter-skelter abandon all in one day—and found a smile upon them now, winning, tender as the eyes which bade him take heart of grace and plead . . . coquetry dead, the arts of conquest gone ; Dorothea in the mood which matched her best ; which made her irresistible, fascinating, one for whom men would fight even as they fought for Helen of Troy.

Perhaps her glance nerved this man who faced her as he had never faced her before, yet he only said, “ I have my orders, Dorothea . . . they are hateful,” and halted uncertain what he had said before the dim fear he saw in her eyes.

“ Your orders, Jag ? ” she faltered, fencing for time.

“ Sailing, you know . . . this day week—Calcutta again.”

She did not answer. He knew she shivered. He knew she watched his eyes as he watched her hands. They were clasping and unclasping the balustrade against which she leaned. At length her look drew his, and he heard her say :

“ Is that why you came—to-night ? ”

He shook this off, uncertain at the moment why he had come. “ Not altogether,” he answered. “ As a matter of fact, I came to—to . . . ” Words died. He captured one hand. “ That stone must be beastly cold,” he said at random. “ Mayn’t I hold it ? ”

Dorothea had so often been held that she had no qualms. His touch was a caress. She gave the other hand to his keeping also. “ It is cold,” she replied, a swift shudder accentuating the words.

“ You poor darling ! ”

He said this in tones that made her heart leap, then lifted the two hands without fear to his lips. He did not kiss them. He pressed upon them as one does when words fail and sympathy alone must speak.

“ You hate me to go ? ” he asked.

“ You know I do.”

“ Will you remember me when I am gone ? ” he asked so low she scarcely heard.

"Yes."

"Always?" he begged.

"For ever."

This time it was Dorothea who whispered, Jag who strained to hear. He continued to press her hands against his cheek, his brow. "They are so soft," he explained. "I did not think you cared two straws. I wonder if you do, Dorette? . . . you said for ever. Did you mean that to be just remembering, you know—or . . ."

She thrust that aside with the smallest possible negation. She did not speak. Speech, you see, is scarcely the vehicle when life is in quest of life. Not a syllable arrived of all the phrases known to each. Scarcely a movement, yet it sufficed; for Jag Haines no longer rubbed cheek on hands, but held her in a fashion that was new to both, yet instantly familiar.

"I feel a brute," he whispered, "telling you this just as I must leave. I had no right to do it."

"Why not?"

"Because I'm a sailor . . . always away . . . and—and wear a livery, you remember."

She lifted her arms and clasped his shoulders. "You mustn't say that . . . please," she begged.

"But it is true."

"Then I love your livery," she whispered. "You mustn't remember what Jimmy said. He was in a horrid temper that day—and you hadn't made it easier for him, had you?"

"I didn't try."

The nightjar laughed out, "Crr-r-!"

"Why?"

"Because he was so—superior. He seemed to want to appropriate you, Dorette. I couldn't bear that even then. . . . I suppose I was jealous," he laughed ruefully. "Years ago, wasn't it?"

"Years," Dorothea admitted, nodding sagely.

"But I loved you even then, you know. . . ."

"I didn't know," said Dorothea. "How could I? . . . Why, I was only a flapper when it happened."

"A flapper who could tease——" he reminded.

"With a nice long pigtail that you could pull. Remember? A perfect handle, wasn't it?" she laughed up at him. "It gave you the whip-hand then."

"And now the whip-hand's yours!"

"I didn't mean that. . . . I . . ."

“Does it matter what we mean, dear heart ? ” he questioned, holding her still.

Apparently it did not. Apparently even Mrs Nesbit's presence up there upon the terrace failed to trouble them. The moon was bright, the country shimmering in receding waves far out upon the fields and valleys beside Leith Hill, only the nightjar wise on his perch beyond the grounds.

“Cr-r-r-r ! ” he said with monotonous insistence. “Cr-r-r-r ! ”

CHAPTER VI

THE PASSING OF JIMMY

THE Rectory stood in grounds which were hidden from the street by high walls, shrubs and giant trees which once had covered the country as an offshoot of the Forest of Dean. Parts of this woodland still survived. Leith Hill, The Northern Way and bits of Cranwood Common were crowned or patched with trees of similar girth to those which screened the Rectory from wind and, largely, from the sun.

Low Willows drowsed upon the hill-side catching the sun on all facets ; but the Rectory looked at a town acknowledging it was smutty, noisy, yet seemed prepared to make the best of it, because, phrase it as you will, the church stood where man had placed it centuries ago, and those who served the church were accustomed to live and die in its shadow.

To hide the fact that he was merged in the town, the Rector encouraged the growth of trees, and, to hide a certain line of smoke-capped chimneys from the dining-room, had built a conservatory about its windows, stocked it with ferns and palms high enough to screen the ugliness from those who sat at meat, piled up moss-hags and provided a fountain to keep them green. Only thus had it been possible to eliminate the chimneys and keep smuts from the table.

Now at one o'clock on the day following the brothers' decision, either Jimmy or Jag, or both, should have reached the Rectory in time to prepare for lunch ; but at one-thirty, in spite of a drummed gong and Madge, who announced her readiness to "eat a donkey stuffed with straw," Jag's epic phrase, you understand, neither had arrived.

"I'm so hungry, Mum," she pleaded in extenuation. "It's Providence morning and I'm not case hardened."

The Rector came in and stood a moment facing his wife. He said grace and sat down. "I agree," he smiled. "If you have done a Providence morning, you have earned your lunch. What has come to the boys ?"

"Out at Low Willows, I expect," said Madge.

"M'm !" said the Rector. "I think we had better begin."

"Probably the car has bucked again," Mrs Haines laughed. "I fancy Jimmy expected a breakdown when he went out."

"Glum ?" the Rector questioned.

"Blues," said Madge, "double goes, you should have seen him."

"My dear!" Mrs Haines pleaded.

"Sorry, Mum—but couldn't we begin? I'm simply screaming."

Mrs Haines looked at the maid standing ready to remove covers and said, "I don't think you need wait, Elizabeth. We will leave the covers."

"Jimmy glum, eh?" Haines repeated as the door closed upon her. "That is unusual. Have you any idea of the cause?"

"The trouble that comes to all of us in our youth," Mrs Haines sighed, prophetic of mien.

"Then it is not the car?" the Rector smiled. "I am glad of that. It is a good car, in spite of certain tricks. . . . You know what it is, Madge?"

Madge knew, or guessed. It is very difficult to determine exactly how much of the game a girl fails to understand when a brother and a friend are concerned. Madge was eighteen. She was emancipated from school and had undertaken Providence work in the parish. It is probable she knew, but she adopted the Frenchman's advice and said:

"I expect Jimmy's bothered about that pup he was to get. They said it was over distemper and it's got it bad. So he can't bring it away, and it won't be over it by the time his leave is up."

There could be but one meaning to this, in spite of her achievement as phrase-maker, and the Rector acknowledged it. He lifted the cover and served. "In that case," he decided, "we waste time. Either of them lunching at Low Willows by chance? . . . er . . . I am presuming, you see, the pup lives there."

Madge looked up swiftly and dabbed at her father's hand. "Dad! You are horrid!" she cried. "It isn't fair."

"Oho! Then that is it. . . . I wondered. Thanks, my dear—yes, two potatoes, if you will."

Mrs Haines obeyed literally. She took one herself. They were what are called new potatoes, and the boys, had they been present, would have cleared the dish—pup or no pup.

"But," said the Rector, "you don't wish to imply that they are both in love?"

"There is no possible shade of doubt," said Mrs Haines.

"Jag hasn't a word to say for himself," Madge decided; "and as for Jimmy, he's simply IT."

"It? My dear——"

"A stick. . . . Why, he has taken to golf, and last night was busy picking out the Indian Love Lyrics with one finger."

The Rector chuckled. "And does the second lady live at Low Willows also?" he asked.

"There is no second lady, Atherton," Mrs Haines replied. "That is the sad part of it."

The Rector set down his knife and fork and leaned on the arms of his chair. "Surely you are joking, my dear. . . ."

"No," said Mrs Haines, "I am quite serious."

"Yes—but are they?"

"Unless I am dreaming, they certainly are."

Madge busied herself with curry and new potatoes now that she saw her father was disturbed. It had to come out. Sooner or later there must be an explosion, for Madge in her introspective way understood that with two people so accustomed to rule as her brothers, a spark would certainly fall now that the train was laid.

"Has Jag spoken to you on the subject?" the Rector asked.

"No."

"Jimmy?"

"No."

"Then the whole thing is inference?"

"Entirely, as far as I am concerned," said Mrs Haines.

The Rector went on with his lunch, but his kind eyes betrayed anxiety. He knew his sons as few fathers do. It had been his pleasure to guide them in their earlier days; to help them with the *pons asinorum* of all small students in Greek or Latin as well as Euclid; to press them on to greater things in youth, to make them see the risks they faced—and now that their schooldays were past remained the faithful counsellor and comrade of their manhood. In spite of this it seemed, as he sat there, he had not touched their depths. He had been remiss. He had not seen—and so it had been left to his wife to diagnose their strange malady; if it were strange where so sweet a girl as Dorothea was protagonist.

He went hat in hand here. The girl was priceless. He admitted that commercialism with pressed lips, staring over the table at a picture of the Holy Family. Had she been his own daughter he could not have loved her more . . . but that both his sons should love her seemed less wise. Surely, he argued, they must have seen whither they walked. Love is very cognizant of all who pass near the shrine. It sees rivals where none exist. It

wilts swiftly in face of shadow—droops, flames, stands ready to strike ; translates simple acts as acts which are aimed to slay, to steal a march, to supplant . . . all the gamut of rivalry and boundless hate.

The Rector knew these things perhaps more certainly than either of his sons knew them. They troubled him, and again he set down his knife and fork and leaned on the arms of his chair.

"But," he urged, "if you are not dreaming, as you say, it means bitterness, pain, anguish for one if not for both. It means the ghastliest kind of sorrow. . . . I can scarcely credit it. They are not blind—surely one or the other must have seen something which would hold him back ; some word or look from Dorothea which would put him in his place. It is obvious she wouldn't encourage *both*—no woman would, unless . . ."

"Dorothea isn't that sort," said Madge, with a genial twist. "I do wish you wouldn't all get the blues."

"I expect you know more than you choose to say," said the Rector.

"*Ra-ther.*"

"And have no qualms ?"

"I'm settling them," said Madge. "Please may I have some more curry ?"

"I'll sell you Jimmy's share," the Rector laughed, "for your opinion."

"No—I'm not prophesying, Dad ; but I tell you this—Dorothea, or any other girl for that matter, isn't going to put either of them out of their stride. It simply isn't done—to-day."

"Pass your plate," said the Rector. "I have no further fear."

The dining-room door opened and Elizabeth came in carrying the usual orange envelope in the usual manner, and said in her usual voice, "For Mr James, sir," although she knew quite well why it came.

The Rector looked up.

"Better put it on his plate, Elizabeth. If he is not in soon it is all he will find."

The girl obeyed and went out. "Poor Jimmy !" Mrs Haines sighed.

And the Rector, looking over his pince-nez at Madge, echoed the plaint. But Madge showed no sign.

Jimmy reached home, of course, and found lunch cleared. He

clattered up the drive soon after three o'clock, jammed on his brakes and entered the hall with his usual signal. The family met him telegram in hand.

"This came a couple of hours ago," said the Rector. "Better read it. Have you lunched?"

"Right-o! Lunched? Rather. Couldn't get back in time, so had a snack at the Crossways." He tore the envelope and scanned the message, whistling.

The Rector, taking mental notes, considered he overdid his part.

"Afraid that puts the lid on leave," said Jimmy, his eyes falling before his father's gaze. "What rotten luck . . . just as I was getting used to all night in, too. Jag will crow!" he added, with a swift turn. "He doesn't sail for a fortnight or something lordly."

Mrs Haines, who had come out at the sound of his voice, linked her arm in his and asked whether the message came from Whitehall.

"No—Whale Island. Gerrard wants me. I must get along at once."

"But your things, my dear! They can't possibly be got ready."

"Then they must follow. . . . Sorry, Mater! No, I'm not aching to get afloat again; but I must . . . simply must."

They closed in on him, the Rector holding one arm, Mrs Haines the other, Madge leading the way.

"I must send a reply or Gerrard will have a fit," said Jimmy. "Find out about a train at the same time." He ruminated and found a pipe. "No more golf here. Have to put off my practice on that stroke till I can get a run somewhere." He lighted the pipe, which "happened" to be loaded. "Wonder where they are going to send me. . . . Lord! what a life. . . . Why, even Jag knows where he's bound, while I . . . Wonder whether Old Whirlwind has anything to do with it . . . possible, *n'est-ce pas?* Well, we must keep on the right side of *him*. No use having a Sea Lord in the family unless we do. . . ."

He moved to the door as he spoke, the two beside him, reading him. "Hardly *in* the family, Jimmy," Mrs Haines expostulated.

He scarcely hesitated.

"No—but soon will be, I fancy. Coming with me?" He halted before cranking up, and they saw that, in spite of the pipe, his eyes had hardened. "Anywhere I can run you, sir?" This to his father. "If so, say the word. . . ."

The word remained unspoken. It seemed that Jimmy clamoured for solitude. They could only guess and reason as those do whose sons and daughters are making ready to fly.

But Madge had no qualms. She got into the car, saying, "You can run me down to the High Street. I had your whack at lunch and I simply couldn't walk."

1915

BOOK II

STINKPOTS

“ There was a door to which I found no key :
There was a Veil past which I could not see :
Some little talk awhile of Me and Thee
There seemed—and then no more of Thee and Me ”

OMAR KHAYYÁM.

CHAPTER I

THE N.S.C.

WHEN entering Eastern waters in the old days, British seamen saw to the tackles of their guns, made ready their boarding pikes and cutlasses, lest pirates should come upon them when their ship was becalmed and seek to smother them with stinkpots. But on the day when *Chilianwallah* sailed, although it was understood that the seas would presently be infested by pirates carrying stinkpots of infinitely greater range and power, Jag Haines knew that he would be compelled to face them with his wits and the ship's nose for armament.

It was mid-June when he sailed, and everything as quiet in England as a winter's night after a heavy fall of snow—if we eliminate the sporadics known as Ireland, the Women's war, Strikes and other delicatessen. No premonition of any great catastrophe existed for the vast majority; but some talk there had been in other circles of præmunire. In a disciplinary form that might have gone far to undo what the winged words of Limehouse had accomplished; but of the coming war, or the necessity to prepare ships for it, the Nation heard nothing. Nor did the crew of *Chilianwallah* consider it. Sailors are accustomed to obey orders. If none are given, there is a *prima facie* case for "letting things rip," as they say. But those who ruled, as the Haines family, the Nesbits, Massenshaws and other thinking folk were to learn, had long bowed before the Frankenstein created by successive Governments and dared no sort of Empiricism.

What would happen if a ship sighted an enemy coming up astern and could not use her nose, Haines could have decided off-hand. She would be scuppered. Anyone conversant with the conditions of sea life knew that you cannot defend a ship if you carry no guns. Except for a few detonators, the Service which keeps England fed and warm has no official armament. As Haines put it—even when we have built a ship which is to carry guns and be used as an auxiliary in war, after a little while we have stripped the guns and gun platforms from her decks in obedience to The Hague, or Geneva, or because some one has twitted us with hypocrisy.

He remembered that when they left home the House was busy with the discussions arising out of a Peace Conference and a Naval Holiday was on the Ministerial table for dissection. It would kill war, prophesied those who fathered it; yet when he reached

Calcutta war had been declared. Apparently the thing had missed fire—and there was Haines and his officers discussing in a haze of rumours what they must do when they got to sea. And on the other hand, there were his Agents, emphatic that he must take no part in it. Nor might he pick up a gun, one of those muzzle-loaders discarded by some princely Indiaman of long ago, and mount it on his bridge. Neutrals would not permit it. The sailors, when they heard, decided some one was getting squared and left it there ; but the look-out was doubled when they sailed, and a crow's nest had appeared high up near a hurriedly installed wireless.

Strangely, they did not appear concerned at their lack of defence. Perhaps they remembered they could not lay a gun, and were uncertain whether it were fired by percussion or a red-hot poker. Of the two methods the latter impressed them because, "if it came to a boarding job," a hot poker would be handy. True. But the men were thinking in terms of the old Chinese Stinkpots—jars in point of fact, not of the Stinkpots of Civilization.

Haines had no illusions on the subject. It became very plain as they stretched away from the Sunderbunds and got in touch with realities. It made him smile to remember he was captain in a new corps—the National Service Corps of the Sea. Some men at the club had given him this title because he had pointed out in a silence which was remarkable that if the Merchant Service failed in its duty, the Army and Navy might get out of harness and pile their arms as Napoleon did at Sedan. "An island and a city," he said, "are very similar in war, and of the two an island is the more difficult to relieve."

One other matter Haines saw through new spectacles as he moved down the Bay of Bengal. As master of *Chilianwallah* he alone of those on board was a civilian. Lawyers may be able to say why, or The Hague, or Geneva. Sir Douglas Clancy had hammered on that nail long ago. "English law and the German interpretation of it," he announced, with the correct snarl, you may be sure, "are equally emphatic on that point. The one calls you Mister ; the other, when war is declared, will call you a *franc-tireur* if you attempt defence. The Hague is at the back of it, as usual. All sailor poison comes from Peace Conferences. Better get out and join up with us."

"Afraid that's impossible, Admiral," had been Haines' reply.

"I should have to begin all over again—besides, there's Dorothea."

"True, there usually is. So you remain a civilian. Well—I am sorry for Dorothea if war comes before you can get that billet."

He remembered, too, how The Whirlwind sprang upon him when he suggested that it might not come to war. "But if it does?" he hammered out. "You would fight rather than be scuppered cold, wouldn't you? You would ram and be damned to it, wouldn't you? Of course! Well—and you can be hung for ramming. A felon's death, mind. Don't forget it. The Germans won't . . ."

Haines had not forgotten it. But it came with new force now. Out there was the sunset fading across the land: the east dark; the sea quiet as the Bitter Lakes which presently he must pass; the road down the Bay peaceful. No submarines there at all events. No *Emden*, in spite of rumours. Nothing unpleasant but the suggestion of a felon's death. . . . Why was Authority so determined the captain of a merchantman should never bear the rank? What was at the back of it? The Navy? He could not believe it. Yet there it stood. He was in command of *Chilianwallah*, and because he was in command he was a civilian and might be hung if he rammed. His men might be hanged, too, for participating in the crime.

Meanwhile, at the end of October *Chilianwallah* had come full circle and Haines was at home with the story of his first encounter with the enemy for Dorothea's delectation.

He had sent out a wireless call to a friend on the *Tuticorin*, a vessel fifty or an hundred miles farther down the Bay, which the *Emden* intercepted. The answer Haines received came from that elusive cruiser. She was chatty. She spoke as from *Tuticorin* to the manner born. She proposed a run as far as Aden in company with *Chilianwallah* and gave her position in order that the two ships might draw together. Haines liked the notion and altered his course in the direction required. They continued to chat. Then came a sentence which puzzled him by its German flavour—"Have you anything of *Emden* seen?"

Stupid beyond words, seeing the ships were already moving to meet. The *Tuticorin's* operator would never have put it so, Haines argued. Only a squarehead could be behind that switch. The thing was a portent, and Jag Haines scored. His *flair* saved

him. He replied by again altering his course, this time without mentioning the fact, and starting on a "Great Circle" track of his own projection, from the Bay of Bengal to Perim, without so far as the log shows, crossing any of the mainland.

It was a feat for which the Underwriters were grateful. They made flattering speeches, and Lloyds purchased a piece of plate which presently might be displayed on Haines' sideboard—as though he ached for that at a time when medals and bars had become the aim of mankind.

CHAPTER II

U 62

AGAIN *Chilianwallah* was passing down Channel on her way to the East, yet, although Dorothea was a member of the C.I.B.,¹ as it was called, and sent out the charts which the ships must use, she knew nothing of the activities either of men or ships. Nor could Haines communicate with her. He and his ship were as vague to the world as the Grand Fleet, hidden somewhere in the North Sea or "at anchor among the Islands."

In sober truth Haines might not use his tongue or his wireless except when he was in touch with the Naval Screen. Indeed, he was so hazy about the actual position at this time that the only fear he and his officers had was the possibility of invasion. A foggy night, they visualized it so, a bit of haze, no moon . . . why! they couldn't help getting there. A blind man could do it if he were set on the road. Any sort of fossil could put them in the way of it. Sea-sense? Lord! they couldn't miss it anywhere along the Broads or Shellness river . . . Dungeness—anywhere if they got pushed off. . . .

And so, as *Chilianwallah* passed down Channel and across the Bay, the question became as one set up and nailed to the gangway—

"Have they tried it yet? Do you think they will?"

But always the answer came back in the cocksure speech of the sea. Patrol and cruiser, all were at one—

"Not they. The beggars don't know enough."

Which was consolatory if not convincing.

Thus they were shepherded South, by way of the Antilles, as it seemed to those who drove her screws, and came round with a Commodore's sweep to Tangier and the Gut. A gale swept up from the west and accompanied them through the Straits, hacked at them all down the Mediterranean and blew as only a Norther can from the white-topped slopes of Crete.

The mountains were capped and gloomy, the sea whipped up, angry, when towards the end of the afternoon watch a destroyer came racing to intercept them.

She had the appearance of a log at the foot of Niagara as she put her nose down and lifted to the torrent that chased her. She was black, and swept fore and aft by white seas. Sometimes her nose was in the air and sometimes her stern. She had the gait

¹ Chart Issue Branch. Hydrographic Department.

of a perpetual seesaw and yawed as she came down a roller like a toboggan unskilfully steered ; yet unlike, seeing she reached her stage untilted.

A drenched figure, muffled to the eyes and streaming rivulets of brine, clung to the rail and signalled to another drenched figure standing at the wheel. He touched a gong, said something into a tube, and H.M.S. *Shark* lay seething on a mountain parallel with *Chilianwallah's* rail. She climbed, it seemed, to the trucks as she halted, and a moment later lay in a hollow beneath *Chilianwallah's* bends.

"Alter your course, sir!" said the boy who had worked this miracle. "Steer south true for four hours, then head for Port Said."

"Right."

Haines signalled assent and gave the necessary order, then through the megaphone he asked :

"Anything in the way, sir?"

And the boy cried cheerily, "Only a U-boat lying doggo. He can't do much in this popple. Keep your course and speed. We are on his tracks. So long!"

Again he spoke into a tube, signed with his hand and the *Shark* twisted, bucked and essayed to leap a comber which approached. But the run was too short, or she had not time to gather herself for the spring before the thing was upon her. So she wallowed through it funnels deep in spume. For a tense moment there was no *Shark*, no lieutenant-commander, no helmsman. The sea appeared to have decided in favour of the U-boat. Then, to prove her ubiquity, the destroyer emerged, black, purring and pouring forth cascades, trickling at every spar and beam as the boy set spurs again to her flanks.

"I thought we knew how to be wet," commented the chief, standing with raised glasses beside Haines, "but these fellows seem to live in the sea and love it."

"When a man has an acknowledged rank, he doesn't mind a wet shirt or two," came back in caustic response. "We have none. That is the whole difference between the two Services."

Now the *Chilianwallah* was not destined to be in contact with the Blonde-beasts of Nietzsche on her outward trip, for the submarine peril had not yet had time to develop. Therefore she came to the Canal in safety, ran its length in record time and reached the splendid seas east of Suez as though no war raged

to endanger shipping, and Haines began to plume himself on his luck.

It was the beautiful season of the north-east monsoon, the Red Sea hot as it always is ; sticky at the southern end, blurred by sandstorms about Jebel Tier and the Cemetery. The only news they got was obtained from vessels homeward bound, and that was not of the latest. Then Aden gave them hope. Invasion still hung fire. . . . Calais was still out of reach for the Huns, our armies slowly maturing ; and there no longer was any *Emden* to fear in Eastern waters. She had been run to earth at the Cocos, of all places, by the Australian cruiser *Sydney*. There had been a fight, a regular set-to, and the *Emden* was lying on the reefs, while most of her crew had been eaten by the land crabs and sharks.

The story, punctuated with poignant snippets, was passed to the *Chilianwallah*, partly by megaphone and partly by the strong lungs of the Aden Patrol. The two vessels ran beside each other, speeding towards Ras Aluleh, the Cape of the Wind's Death. The Arabian Sea was still and burnished like a mirror. Outlining it to the north were the pink hills of the coast and the granite peaks of Aden.

"The silly blighter," said the officer of Patrol, "thought he would be clever. Made for the wireless station—but not before our Johnny had placed him and sent out calls. Of course, he tried to block that . . . but we got home on the Australian Trooper Convoy, and by the time Fritz had silenced us, the *Sydney* was detached and sent Hell for leather in his tracks.

"Got him too ! Kept outside his range and plugged him good. Knocked spots off him every time he tried to close. He was game. Oh, Lord ! he was game . . . and if there's a gentleman in the Hun Navy his name is Karl von Müller. They saved him. Took him prisoner, b'gad ! and are going to stuff him and put him in a glass case in Melbourne. That ought to make the Cornstalks cluck. . . . Well—so long, Captain. You need not worry about tin fish here. There's only that blighter Spee to reckon with, and I think we have his measure. . . . How ? "

The officer chuckled. He lifted his hand and brayed through the megaphone : "Ask Jacky Fisher when you get home."

His face, red and weather-beaten, expanded as he said it.

So it went on. To-day *Chilianwallah* would be talking to a naval officer on the bridge of a thing like a dredger, to-morrow or to-morrow holding high converse with the gold lace of a cruiser

carrying four raked funnels and a full complement. The sea was studded with the grey ships of England and Japan, each of them lifting a welcoming hand to cheer the merchantman on.

It had come to be recognized what risks these " Civilians " ran, the unstable character of their billets, and the Navy knew and damned because it understood that when a steamer was put down the cellar her crew, if any escaped, immediately ceased to draw pay. It damned because the merchantmen stood up to be shot at, and without guns tackled the U-boats. It damned because it had learned that after being sunk by enemy stinkpots, those saved frequently had to make good their losses or go bare before the Public whom they served.

It was not until *Chilianwallah* reached the Mediterranean on her homeward trip that she came in actual contact with the Blonde-beast. She had escaped the Grecian Island base, crept past Adriatic, through the Maltese channel and was beginning definitely to plume herself on her success, when gunfire suddenly brought all hands on deck.

It was blowing a sticky and moisture-laden sirocco. The horizon had closed in as it does in soundings under the influence of a sou'west gale. The look-out was alert fore and aft, the ship pushing her way through mists which in other times would have warranted the use of a foghorn.

At two o'clock in the afternoon, when not far from Cape Bon, Haines expected to be able to see a vessel which was using her guns so close that each discharge shook the chart table and rattled the binoculars in their box, yet the sea was bare of sail or steam. It was wet, and the solid air jarred as the ship jarred : the drops of moisture formed on ridge-rope and stay, quivered and fell with each thud.

They had come upon the noise so suddenly that it was evident they were close ; yet at one moment the officer of the watch decided the concussions were on the port beam, at another dead ahead. Then, after a little pause, the navigator came up to add his verdict and said he could stake his life the trouble was on the starboard bow. As this happened to coincide with the commander's opinion and that of at least one of the look-out men, all eyes were set to search the starboard blur.

The vaunted Mediterranean was the colour of a London street on a wet day. The balm and spice-laden breeze of " Afric's sunny shore " came off in chunks to sting men's eyes. It was clammy,

hot, uncomfortable ; the brasswork tinged with a pattern done in mauve and brown, the bridge steaming in an atmosphere which would have done credit to the mule rooms in a cotton mill ; the men who marched to and fro were as limp as the hands who tend the mules. Then, quite unnecessarily it appeared, Captain Haines twisted on his heel and snapped, "Stand by below !"

He stamped with one foot on the grating and added, "All hands on deck. . . . Boat Stations !"

An answer came from one who stood to manipulate the ship's telegraphs. Gongs clanged, musically brazen in engine-room and at stations far apart ; the jangle of chain gearing was heard. Up aloft the wireless took in a message which said "H.M.S. *Dauntless* requires position of gunfire," but in words which seemed to indicate lunacy ; and from far off came a voice questioning what gunfire, badinage, prayers to "keep out."

A bo'sun¹ passed screaming through the heavy air, escaping from concussions which jarred the staid bones of *Chilianwallah* and made her quake. Men stood listening, expectant. The mist streamed past.

Drops of moisture ran into groups on ridge-rope and rails, trembled and fell with a little tinkle of surprise in pools rilling to join hands. Streams appeared trickling scupperward, so that the bridge might spout upon the brine. Companion bo'suns piping shrilly of their fear, flew landward in the wake of the first . . . then, quite suddenly out of the blurred and steaming air, a tramp appeared lying drunkenly on her bilge.

Her head was down, guzzling the seas ; her stern up. A propeller revolved wantonly in mid-air. It seemed to be engaged in flicking at the crests of wavelets leaping like hounds at a deer that is spent. She was on fire amidships, and four cockleshell boats danced in the spume beside her. She was disreputable, ugly ; dabbed with paint and tallow like a chequer-board. Her funnel lurched as she rolled.

"Slow ! Stop !" came from the *Chilianwallah's* commander. The vibrations ceased.

She had come so suddenly out of the mist, the roar of steam and flame grew so instantly, that for some moments no one saw the slim, grey beast of the sea lying so near, engaged in massacre. The crash of a shell changed all that. It seemed louder. Even the flash was seen—and with it the U-boat, the pirate of modern days, flinging his stinkpots.

¹ A white sea bird with a tail like a marlin's pike.

She lay off at her ease, taking pot shots at the steamer and at her boats. When a shell struck the vessel, a bass voice guffawed, "Hoch! Hoch!" leading the rest. When one landed amidst the boats, or sent up a sea which creamed over them, they shouted with laughter.

It was this that made Haines see red, twist on his heel and snap out, "Port! Over with her," cross to a speaking-tube and call "Give her full speed ahead, Chief—give her all you know. . . ."

Then he came back and stood to watch his ship swing.

He was silent after that flash, statuesque. On either side of the binnacle were companion figures, posed as it seemed with raised glasses. They had no thought of seeking shelter. It did not occur to them as essential. They were engaged in searching for signals which should explain what was in progress. Then an officer called across the bridge:

"It's U-62, sir," as though he had expected to meet her there, and the Captain's reply followed:

"You are right—German. . . . Only a German could act in that fashion."

Until this moment, in spite of the fact that *Chilianwallah* was set to ram, no one had quite gathered who was who in this business. All the signals pointed to massacre, but nothing definite had appeared. Now they knew. They knew, too, that in a very few moments the *Chilianwallah* might also be a victim.

Fore and aft men lined the ship's rail watching and damning the pirate crew at their work. German sailors crowded the conning-tower and plank-like fore-deck, labouring in the spume to train and fire their gun. The voices of officers encouraging their men came across the narrowing stretch of sea . . . while out there one by one the steamer's boats were hit, the atoms who manned them flicked piecemeal into the mist.

In a growling monotone the *Chilianwallians* cursed the stupidity which left their ship unarmed at this juncture.

"Gawd! for a gun," one prayed, jabbing at the rail with his knife.

"Whisht! we'll get her with the stem," another intoned, "the blinkin' stem." He twisted about. "She's too busy to see," he explained.

"A shell's my medicine. A knife in the beast's throat. Blood's what I want. . . . Gawd! See that? She's goin'."

A sailor appeared on the steamer's rail as she heeled. He caught at a rope which dangled over the side and scrambled down.

Beneath him was the sea, flicking, white, throwing bubbles as the hull stooped for the plunge. He reached the bilge keel and rested there a moment shouting to those who remained. He seemed dazed. Then, as he slid down, the U-boat trained for a pot shot. An officer elbowed to the front and fired. There was a splash, and what remained of the man wobbled in the hole which the shell had bored.

A cheer broke out at that, a guffaw which suddenly died as one turned and saw the racing *Chilianwallah*.

An order fell—sharp, instant. Then swiftly as in a dream the grey hull faded. The gun was no longer there, the men had vanished. The hull sank in the white trough it had scooped. Nothing remained but the mist, the swirling eddies, the bubbles and froth of exodus.

A moment earlier Captain Haines had recognized that he would swing wide ; therefore he reversed the starboard propeller. That caused a new sound in the vile medley which throbbed and echoed about them ; touched the dulled ears of the look-out and the thing was done.

In a fine fury of spume the *Chilianwallah* charged down upon the spot, came round with a sweep to that patch of seething, glassy water and struck.

A small shock ran through the ship. A shock so paltry to those who were braced for a fall, that they questioned its value as a knock-out. They leaned over the ship's side examining the swirl, but nothing appeared. They leaned there depressed, triumphant, satiric in turn, swapping the jargon of the sea.

"Missed !" one cried, and spat upon the spume.

"Yer sister's missed !" came swiftly back at this.

"Look at them bubbles !" cried a third.

"Bubbles . . . bubbles . . . Ain't the blinking sea made up of bubbles w'en it's stirred ?"

But Haines had no illusions. "Got her !" was his verdict given with compressed lips. "Thank God for that !" he added, and commenced to walk up and down the bridge. . . . "Stop ! Engines full speed astern . . . down lifeboats," came in sequence. Then, "Keep in touch with the ship and signal how you want us to move."

The boats went away ; but Haines remained on board to manœuvre as desired.

All round was the narrow and blurred horizon, the stagnant seascape, tinged wavelets rising and falling, inert. On every hand

splinters of wood, broken oars, bailers ; lifebelts carrying maimed sailors ; belts carrying trunks which refused to sink, limbs which oscillated to and fro, already becoming white—all the apparel of *sauve qui peut* and massacre combined, splayed upon the grey waters of the inland sea.

The boats came upon one who was unwounded but nearly drowned, and him they brought back to life. They came upon another *sans* legs and one finger, who cried tragically of the pain of his maimed hand, and died suddenly as they lifted him to the boat.

So they paddled back to the *Chilianwallah*, back soberly as is the fashion when men are wrung, hoisted their boats and moved away for home. And as they steamed west, Haines sent out a message which distant ships and stations picked up.

“From *Chilianwallah*,” she said in the code of the hour. “In Lat. 37° 30' N., Long. 11° 08' E. ; assistance no longer required. Vessel unknown sunk by gunfire from U 62. One hand saved, but distraught. U 62 rammed by *Chilianwallah*, and sunk with all hands.”

CHAPTER III

THE LONDON SCENE

THE first inkling that he had become famous in one country and infamous in another reached Haines as he came at a safe distance past Ushant one morning in April. It was dark, the *Chilianwallah* without lights, the wind very gentle and from the west. As far as those who kept watch could judge, *Chilianwallah* moved up the home-stretch in splendid solitude. Her skin matched the night. Masts, bridge, superstructure—all were of grey: the grey of the fighting ships which gave her freedom to move. Ushant winked with a glare that swept the sky.

A quartermaster crossed the deck and struck one bell so quietly it seemed he feared to wake the watch below. But no one slept. The men were at stations, ready in case of need. Then from the greyness on the ship's port beam came a swift gleam, blinking out the identification signal.

Haines standing in the wing called to the officer on watch:

"What did you make of it?"

"Patrol, sir. One of ours."

"Quite. Reply. . . . My brother is out here somewhere. I shouldn't be surprised if . . ."

There appeared upon the reply a beam of light so dazzling that *Chilianwallah* stood revealed in unwarlike silhouette at little less than pistol range. It swept her from stem to stern while men and officers shrank back blind. It examined her masts, lingered over her funnel, focussed on her bow—then went out, leaving a night like a pit with the lid on.

To confuse her and to push home their own ubiquity, at the stranger's masthead appeared a blinker with a stream of dots and dashes, so swiftly given no *Chilianwallian* could follow it. Haines sent back a message asking for grace, and there came more slowly:

"Is that *Chilianwallah*?" given at the orthodox twelve words a minute.

"Yes," was flashed in response.

"I am H.M.S. *Lightning*," said the masthead. "Got any more U-boats on the way up?"

Haines gasped. "So! that was known already." He said on the Morse. "No, nor have we seen any."

"Lucky for Fritz," said the genial masthead. Then, in sober phrase with point and emphasis, "Captain's compliments

and congratulations to Captain Haines on his action. Would much enjoy accompanying him to Admiralty. Regret that impossible."

Sailing orders followed : the names of headlands to be given a wide berth, advice as to zigzagging, a message from Number One to Piccadilly couched in the words of a lover to his mistress, and—"So long!"

A dim, grey dawn was breaking over the ships as they parted—*Chilianwallah* soberly, with that message for Piccadilly on her tablets; *Lightning*, with a surge of the counter-wave that broke white in her wake. From the moment of contact to that of departure she gave the impression of an immense prescience, a perfect control, and now as a grey smudge heading sou'-west, smoke blotting her, shadowing her, she slipped away—a unit of the majestic Service that kept us all inviolate, busy in the grey-ness that the world might live.

But it was in Gravesend Reach that Haines reached the pinnacle of fame, and with Sharums Limited some hours later he crashed to Mother Earth.

That he was famous on the Thames and infamous in Berlin was perhaps the reason why his owners made steep pauses when acclaiming his story. It savoured certainly of "Wait and see," an axiom still in vogue in those days.

Since Peter Witterspoon, the Park Lane descendant of a millionaire pill-maker, put him on his feet, Sharums had blossomed and acquired the strength to issue decrees which meant the end of all things to the ass who had failed to read his orders intelligently. Haines had been face to face with these people for an hour and already was dizzy. The blaze of light that touched Longman Avenue produced a headiness fatal to one on a pinnacle. He had forgotten his adventurous homecoming, H.M.S. *Lightning's* genial comment, the war and his own incursion into it. He had forgotten he was in uniform, unconscious that passers stared at the four short gold bands on his shoulder-straps. He did not know the papers and some other powers had done their best and their worst to blazon him—yet, in a sense, already he was aware he had sinned and was "for it," as they were beginning to say. Crashed!

When he left his ship that morning Haines had telegraphed to Dorothea asking her to meet him; now he began to wonder whether she would meet him. If he had played the fool she would

be justified ; but had he ? He came to the Bank and boarded a bus bound west. Presently it moved towards St Paul's in a blaze of sunlight that was heartening. His spirits rose with the square of his progress from the City ; he began again to reach towards the pinnacle. The Hive certainly had troubled him. Sharums had explained that a cheque would be forthcoming. It was, he said, a matter on which he had no volition. Haines was uncertain whether the great man liked or disliked the notion, but gathered that the whole trend of opinion in the City was in favour of recognition—which is to say, cheques. "The sublime indifference to danger and death shown by Our Merchant Seamen" demanded recognition, and a City which thinks in terms of millions very naturally diagnosed cheques. So far it seemed Sharum had made himself plain ; but there lurked something further, something unassigned—some note as of displeasure which hummed on the monotone resolved by cheques.

A passenger seated on the far side of the gangway intervened here. He leaned towards Haines and said as they trundled down the slope beyond St Paul's, "Excuse me, sir ; but do you happen to be Captain Haines of the liner *Chilianwallah* ?"

Haines, with puzzle in his eyes and creases growing over them, looked round and said, "Yes. What of it ? I don't seem to recollect . . ."

The man smiled. He took off his hat, bowed and explained : "I could have sworn to it. My work is in Fleet Street—pictures. I put one of yours the other day in the *Bystander* . . . proud to ride in the same bus with you, sir."

Again he raised his hat. Haines, very red and flustered, acknowledged, as well as he was able, by a salute. He stared at this young man and stared up the crooked street called Fleet, thinking of the sea and the spray-washed ships which kept it unscorched. The bus was crowded, and the seat on which Haines tried to resist jerks and jolts was occupied by one who was seized to it. She was large and quaked like a blancmange, and when the picture expert descended somewhere near Temple Bar, it appeared that she, too, was "in the know," as she said quite plainly.

Haines shrank into a smaller compass and turned up the collar of his coat—as though that would hide him !

"What happens," asked the lady, "if you ram a pirate ?"

Haines with lips tightly compressed said he didn't know.

"Oh ! but you must," she brimmed, suffused in smiles and jelly-like undulations, "if you rammed one."

"But I did not ram in the way . . ."

"No ; but your ship did."

"Did it ?" Haines asked.

"Yes. I heard what that gentleman said and I've seen the papers. I'm as proud as what he is, sittin' on the same seat as you, too . . . not that you have much of it ! That's the worst of bein' fat !" She laughed, enjoying herself immensely. "I've a friend in the Navy," she added. "Sit nearer. I shan't bite ! He's on the *Billy-rough-un*¹—in with the engines."

Haines moved a trifle nearer. He noticed that the buttons which held her together seemed strained. A vision of the appalling consequences of a rip choked him, yet he managed to gasp, "I expect your friend could tell you more about it than I can . . . and—Hallo ! I get down here . . . so sorry."

He rose, banged the signal gong and reached the platform. On it a man stood talking to the conductor. He looked fit and well fed.

"No—you need not worry about that," he said. "Our chaps have got hold of them. Germany's done."

The bus stopped. The man sprang down, Haines followed and the two came near a collision.

"Sorry," said the man. "My fault. Talking. That duffer seems to think he ought to enlist . . . damned nonsense !"

He went off swiftly cocksure and self-complaisant without waiting Haines' response, and the bus rolled on, handkerchiefs waving from her roof. Some one shouted. Haines glanced round. The people on the pavement he approached, in face of those moving splashes of white, seemed uncertain whether to consider him a malefactor or a hero. Either, he felt, would be extremely inconvenient at this juncture. Then, to rescue him came a taxi, ambling slowly from nowhere, which angled to take him up, slammed the door upon him and moved purring for the west.

Haines leaned back comforted by the soft luxury of well-brushed cushions and a bunch of giant daffodils in a vase on the glass. He opened both windows and let the cool air rush over him. He had nearly forgotten the City with its cheques and pendant sword, or whatever it was, in the tragedy of recognition. He was uncertain how far the thing might carry him, whether to

¹ *Bellerophon*,

fortune or to oblivion. It astonished him to learn that he was known. He began to wish the order for uniform was less drastic, the people endowed by forgetfulness. He need not have worried. He was coming to that part of London where white feathers were found for those who were not in uniform, and expulsion from public places for those who wore, not the King's uniform, but that of the Merchant Service or the Volunteers. It was a part of London he knew, a part which hummed as Fleet Street hummed, but in the old way ; without the premonition of the journalists—folk for long dubbed Scaremongers or Patriots, as the mood urged.

Haines would have had all the world asleep or banished at this moment, for he had reached the top of Bond Street, which was the rendezvous, and saw its crowd. He came slowly to the belief that it was the last place he would choose in future. It seems he had imagined everybody busy in one sphere or another connected with the war, yet here was the old company, augmented no doubt by the luncheon hour ; even to the hatless brigade—not a soul of them busy.

And here, too, was Haines, tricked out in his own particular brand of blue and gold, descended from the taxi and wondering whether by any legerdemain he could smother the gold and appear as a civilian. Then he caught sight of a hat and furs which could belong to no one if not to Dorothea, and hurried to greet her. She happened, of course, to be just where the crowd was thinnest . . . nearly half a mile off, too, by Jove ! . . . and there was an infernal something, curiosity perhaps, in the air which blocked his passage just when he prayed for a clear run.

Half a mile !

Among other sins, a sailor's gift of exaggeration is perhaps the least. Haines contrived, in spite of the press, to cover the distance while one could count fifty. Legerdemain here certainly . . . but the gods smile on youth. In war-time perhaps they smile more generously than in years of sober striving ; for in the days with which this history is now concerned the war was only slowly coming home to the majority of the Nation ; slowly tearing away phantasy, slowly showing it the valour of our splendid youth, our golden youth, which Bellona the Hydra was calling.

Jag Haines came through the throng smiling, his hand raised in salute. He took Dorothea's hands in his, both of them, in spite of her burden of furs and bag and dangling chains. Then

he said, "What a ripping shot! . . . I hope you haven't been waiting?" He smiled, adding so that she alone could hear, "How sweet you look! I want to kiss you. . . . I want to kiss your hands."

"If you were French or Italian," said Dorothea, "you wouldn't say you want to kiss my hands, you would do it." Then she parenthesized in the voice we all use when self-conscious, "How well you are looking! I am glad to see you. Where *in the world* did you spring from?"

"Taxi," Haines said, and paused as a man who passed commented so that it was impossible to avoid the inference: "No—Merchant Service. . . . No curl over the top stripe, you see; but of course it's a colourable . . ." He was gone, his voice silenced by the traffic.

"Caught!" Haines smiled, looking after him. "Docketed. Turned down. Not even one of the Curly Gang. . . ." ¹ Then, as Dorothea looked puzzled, he explained: "You see, there is a movement on foot to rob us of our Crowns and to halve the width of our stripes. . . . You heard what that chap said? Well, I can complete it: 'It's a colourable imitation of the Navy . . . and we are the older Service.' . . . The ass!" Then he laughed, for Dorothea's hand was on his arm, pressing it swiftly. "Don't!" on her lips, and "Jimmy isn't here!"

"As a matter of fact," Jag told her, "I am a Civilian—officially, I believe. Come—let us get in somewhere and lunch. You will, won't you?"

And Dorothea, swift to accept the change, breathed the word we all wait for, which comes so pat to-day—"Ra-ther!"

The subtleties of curls and stripes were fresh in her memory, and she knew enough of the jangle which existed at that time to be certain that some new stupidity threatened the Merchant Service. Civilians! She had no words for her contempt, yet, on this day of happy augury and splendid sunshine, she desired to "fen" all bothers.

She was not aware of the Order which had been made; nor that the restaurant to which they drove had figured in several small disputes in connection with it. Jag was in uniform because orders to that effect had been issued by Admiralty, and he knew nothing of disputes or challengers. He was concerned to get lunch and moved towards a table which stood vacant far up the room.

¹ R.N.R.

A waitress approached as they sat and stood to take their order very much as "Fritz" in the old days had taken it. Dorothea was unbuttoning her gloves, Haines taking off his overcoat, when a man in a frock-coat and high collar came near and said :

"I beg your pardon, sir ; but would you mind telling me if you are wearing the uniform of His Majesty's Navy ? "

Haines, with one laced sleeve free and the other still shrouded, glanced round and answered quite casually, "No—why ? "

Very apologetically the frock-coat extended hands.

"I am sorry, sir. It is the last thing I should venture on my own initiative, but my Directors, in view of the trouble we have had . . . officers challenged, sir, by the Military Authorities . . . have decided not to serve customers in uniform, sir—when that uniform is not the Army's or Navy's. . . ."

Haines stared.

"Do you mean to tell me," he asked, speaking so that all could hear, "that you refuse to serve me because I am wearing a Merchant Service uniform ? "

"Sorry, sir. I have my orders. I must obey them."

"I don't quarrel with you or with your orders. Send the manager to me, or one of your Directors."

"Beg pardon, sir—I am the manager, and my Directors are not in the building. . . . An officer of Volunteers was challenged here last week, sir . . . and I am sure you do not wish to put us to the inconvenience of . . ."

"I think you exceed your instructions, sir. Send for one of your Directors. I sit here. It appears to me I have entered one of those places which refused to serve soldiers in uniform before the war and now are for 'business as usual.' You can serve me or not as you like. If I am challenged, I shall know how to reply. If you do not serve me and this lady, I shall summon you for breach of your licence. There's my card. Now do as you please."

The manager bowed. There were unpleasant stirrings at adjoining tables. He began to be sorry he had taken the initiative. He stared at the card as he retired, and came to the conclusion that this order of his Directors meant "looking for trouble." He halted, uncertain. "Haines. . . . Captain William Atherton Haines . . . where *had* he heard that name ? " He read further and saw in the corner : s.s. *Chilianwallah*.

Then he knew.

Captain Haines and Dorothea obtained their lunch. The

waitress was suffused in smiles. The adjoining tables looked as though they shared Haines' victory, and one man, as he crossed to reach his hat on leaving, said to him, "Glad you sat on that beggar, sir. Officious ass!"

Haines laughed. So did Dorothea. They were young, you observe, and had much to learn.

CHAPTER IV

IN THE LIMELIGHT

FOR a man who had become famous Haines enjoyed a singular freedom during his first week on leave. True, he was a long way from ships or the Hive, as he called it, and very intent on expeditions, golf, the Glory Woods or Box Hill with Dorothea for companion.

Silence had fallen on all those doings which ended in the triumphal progress of *Chilianwallah* up the Thames. An invitation from the Chief Magistrate of Docktown had been accepted, because the Padre decided that it was his prerogative to single out members of the electorate and to pin them down to hear speeches. For the rest there was silence. Not a word from Sharums, Limited; the cheque still in the clouds, Admiralty making no effort to revive the hullabaloo of Haines' return. Jag and Dorothea very grateful that it should be so.

But it could not last. For sailors and those who love them to-morrow's horizon is always blurred whether war or peace prevail. When, therefore, the day arrived on which Jag was to go to Town, and the crew of *Chilianwallah* were to foregather in the Town Hall at lunch, neither Dorothea nor her lover were amazed to find a note from Sir Douglas awaiting them when they came down to breakfast.

It was plain from this the Admiral had not forgotten them, a fact which proclaimed itself anew when they reached the Admiralty. There it separated them. Miss Nesbit must wait, unchained it is true, whilst Haines, led by a messenger, ascended the stairs.

On the landing the boy paused, and having indicated the direction, left the Captain to himself with—"On the right, sir. Room thirty-seven. Got a notice on the door."

Haines found it. It said in bold type—

"COME IN. DON'T KNOCK.
TAKE OFF YOUR HAT ON
ENTERING. IF YOU CAN'T
TAKE YOUR HAT OFF,
STAY OUTSIDE."

Haines entered, at his ease instantly, his cap under his left arm, a smile on his lips.

It was a long room nearly devoid of furniture, and its bare decks seemed cleared for action, if one may use the expression of so peaceful an environment. A fire blazed in a dusty grate ; around it was a fender seat, well-worn, and before it what was left of a rug. On the table were some charts and books, heaped as if for reference, and near them an officer, Navy written all over him, dark, not tall, strong, with eyes which saw through you, who sat speaking with two or three who were beside him.

In a minute, as Haines moved up the room, these melted away and he was left with the Chief. He was not in uniform, but Haines had no difficulty in recognizing him, especially when he caught the frank, sailor eyes as he led off with :

"The First Sea Lord is jammed and asked me to intercept you. Hence the deflection. Shall we sit ?" And as they moved to the fire he went on, "Lucky shot that of yours, if I may say so, Captain Haines."

Haines thanked him and they sat chatting over the incident, and from that to the stupidity of the challenge which awaited him in London.

"Tut ! tut !" The Commander pushed it away. "Stupid ! Damnable ! But as we shall all be captains or colonels before this thing's done with, you may take it from me your status will be defined. . . . By the way, they tell me you have a brother in the Navy—what ship ?"

"*Chanticleer*, sir—as far as I know."

"Destroyer," he announced. "Yes"—he turned it up—"temporarily attached to Dover Patrol—the slanged, damned Dover Patrol, eh ?" He looked up, twinkling.

"Slanged I can imagine ; but why damned ?" Haines put in.

"Wire-pullers. Some one's got his knife into Bacon. And Bacon doesn't advertise. Puts his foot on Limelight and Limehouse. . . . Ah ! here is the First Sea Lord. Ring me up when he's done with you."

The door opened and Sir Douglas entered holding out his hands. "So you've done it !" he tapped out staccato as they met. "No—don't go, Challoner, I can only stay two minutes. . . ."

"Done what, Admiral ?" Jag asked in the silence that followed.

"Sunk a U-boat and forgot to be mum over it—in spite of my warning, too. What am I to do with him ?" He looked up at the Naval Censor.

"Leave him to me, sir. We will clip his wings."

"All very fine—now the damage is done. He had no sooner

sunk her than he began to talk, wireless if you please, and all the world agape to hear his news."

"Surely not," said the Commander, while Jag searched first one and then the other. "Hum—what code did he use?"

"Naturally the one they had stolen. He was explicit, too. I will read his signal." He opened a straw-coloured paper and read verbatim: "From *Chilianwallah*. Latitude 37° 30' North; Longitude 11° 8' East. Assistance no longer required. Vessel unknown sunk by U 62. One hand saved, but distraught . . .' Distraught, Challoner. 'U-boat rammed by *Chilianwallah* and sunk with all hands!' " He faced Haines, his eyes alert but twinkling. "That was your message. . . . You admit it?"

"Certainly I admit it, sir."

"And the code?"

"Yes. We all used it. How could we tell it had been stolen?"

"You could not, as it happens." He smiled brazenly with this admission, and Haines, accepting that smile, said:

"I didn't suppose I could, Admiral—or I should be saying my prayers by this."

"You would need them!" came with a snap, and Haines, glancing at the Chief Censor, fancied he read caution in his glance—perhaps offered as a hint. "But," said the voice of the First Sea Lord, "if I exonerate you, there are some I do not exonerate. *Verbum sap.* . . . you follow me?"

Haines, feeling like a plucked fowl, admitted that he did.

"Unfortunately," Sir Douglas insisted, "it appears rather to leave you in the limelight, doesn't it?"

"I'm afraid it does, sir," Haines admitted, and instantly his mind switched away from this aspect of the "limelight" to that of the bus and the lady who bid him sit nearer on the ground that she would not bite. Involuntarily a smile crept into his eyes, and, as though he waited for that, Sir Douglas chuckled broadly. He turned brimming with merriment to the Naval Censor.

"What am I to do with him, Challoner?" he asked. "A man who smiles when he has gotten himself into the limelight is lost. . . . Hopeless. Damned in Heaven and on earth. If he happens to be in command at sea or in the Field, and his country *happens* to be at war, he is more damned than if it happened to be at peace. . . . For, mind you, all the Quidnuncs are on their hind legs watching him. . . .

"You see"—he became explanatory here, one finger wagging, ominous—"you are engaged to be married to Dorothea Nesbit,

who probably is downstairs waiting to hear your fate—my god-child and the apple of my eye. Her father I saved from the financiers, German, in May, 1914, lest his predilection for internationalism should make it difficult for her, and me, in my old age. And now I must save you—or she will never forgive me, will she ? ”

As well as he was able Haines suggested that, seeing she was so near, it would be quite easy to send for her ; but Sir Douglas broke in on that :

“ No, no. . . . Not now. I am busy—besides, it won’t do to let her know the upshot of all this. The trouble, my boy, is that you *are* in the limelight—German brand. Nordeich got hold of that damned message of yours and you are marked down. If they get you they will shoot you, or hang you. That is one of the difficulties you Merchant Service men have to face willy-nilly, and Dorothea must not know it. The *Chilianwallah*, too, is a marked ship in consequence. They know now, over there ”—he pointed with his thumb towards a blurred window and spoke more quietly—“ why U 62 no longer has any reports to make. . . . And we know—you bear me out there, Challoner—that another U-boat is already on her way to take up the station vacated by U 62, and, incidentally, with orders to sink *Chilianwallah* and take you prisoner. . . . Far-reaching, isn’t it ? ”

Haines, with a picture of Sharum’s attitude as he commented on the inadvisability of merchant ships undertaking hostilities, said, “ I think it quite on the cards I shall not be in her, sir.”

“ Good ! ” commented the Admiral.

“ Why not ? ” asked the Naval Censor.

“ I don’t think my owners like what happened.”

“ Quite possibly,” Sir Douglas decided. “ Still, what gives you that impression ? ”

“ They seemed to be playing for time. They walked round picking holes in everything. Then, just as I was leaving the Board-room, the Chairman asked if I had read their instructions to Commanders after I left. I said I had, but the only one that stuck seemed to infer that I was a civilian, and therefore if Fritz caught me playing with guns and things he might take me out and hang me.”

“ True, so he could,” Sir Douglas frowned.

“ ‘ But,’ Sharum questioned, ‘ did you read the sealed instructions we sent when you sailed ? ’ I said I had. ‘ And did you not see one which gave positive instructions that in no case were

you to take the initiative in case you met an enemy ship ? ' I confessed I didn't remember reading such an order ; and Sharum, after a little talk about the excessive cost of our wireless set and some other matters, said, ' Well, good day, Captain—and when you are on board again, I should be glad if you would study order No. F.59 and oblige me by telling me whether you initialled it.' "

" And had you ? " Sir Douglas flashed.

" I had, sir."

" Well ? "

" Since then I have heard nothing from them. I have been on leave, as a matter of fact ; but I have a feeling that when this presentation business is done with they will ask for my resignation."

" Hum ! Patriotic crowd," the Admiral breathed. " Who are they ? "

" Sharums, Limited, of Longman Avenue."

He twisted, frowning, to face the Censor. " Isn't that the firm who own the *Illanaba* ? "

" Yes, sir, and another. Both of them stuffed full of contraband."

" Hum ! What are we doing about it ? "

" Letting them through, Admiral."

" F.O. again ? "

" Without a doubt. It's sheer fooling."

" I know, I know ! One of the damned strings that keeps the Navy tied. Who's behind them ? "

" Froisardt, Peter Witterspoon, Vorosky and the old gang, reinforced by this new man Alan Wassiter, who may be Stiennes or Ballin or Caillaux, all pulling the same string, ' the continuous voyage,' sanctity of charter-parties and the rights of neutral consignees."

" I see." He turned to Haines again. " Well, well—resign. If they don't order it, do it all the same."

" I should love to, sir ; but I have to consider Mr Nesbit," Jag put in.

" Leave him to me."

He crossed the rug before the fire twice or thrice and turned with his back to it, his hands behind him. Challoner, astride a chair, sat attentive.

" You are aware, Haines, that when a naval officer sinks a ship he and his crew receive prize-money according to their rating.

It has been so always, but for some reason your Service is left out. In spite of that, I want you to understand that this is no ordinary war, my boy. It is war to the knife. I resent as deeply as you must that we may not arm your ships so that you may protect yourselves from submarines; nor can we make you eligible for prize money. So you had better take your cheque and resign. The neutrals are uncertain who is going to win the war. Therefore it is unlikely they will run the risk of angering Germany by consenting to admit armed Merchantmen in their harbours . . . and our Nation is blind. Coronel did not open its eyes. Craddock's heroism taught it nothing. Beyond the splendid few it is still entranced by football . . ."

He stood still, glanced at his watch, then went on :

"Let me think what I can do ; but resign. That is essential. By the way, His Majesty is very much interested in your case—that for your pipe when you are on watch, and my love to Dorothea. Not a word though of this to her or anyone. You are on your honour . . . make my excuses as best you can."

With that he was gone and Haines free to explain the inexplicable. This he did by recounting the King's message as given by Sir Douglas, whereat Dorothea smiled and said, "I guessed as much," hugged his arm and added, "Now see me to Victoria and go away quickly, or you will be late for lunch and won't have time to make that speech."

So they parted, and Jag faced east.

It was five o'clock when he returned from the City and outside Dorking station a band and a crowd had assembled. He wondered why, looked up and down the platform in search of any notability, found none and met the stationmaster, who opened his eyes while engaged in half closing his own. "No occasion to look for anyone, Captain Haines," he announced. "It's yourself ; and may I have the first shake ?" He had.

It was all very spontaneous and exhilarating. The civic dignitaries enjoyed themselves, so did the crowd, and so, too, did the band. It became necessary, in view of the fact that someone in a fur-lined cloak was welcoming him, to consider a reply. It came to a moment when Haines, all in his war-paint, as he put it, had to climb the seat of a motor, take off his cap and do penance. It appeared then that he was able to do it, and that the crowd knew when to help him with cheers.

It was all very jovial and inspiring here, because, as Haines

said, he was in the presence of his own people. He knew the policeman over there better than he knew the Mayor. He knew those leather-clad porters from the station even better than he knew the Councillors. He had often tipped them ; they had often shouldered his sea-chest—his “ donkey,” as he reminded them—and they cheered to the echo.

He knew the bandsmen. French Horn was a special favourite at the Rectory, and often did odd man in the garden and churchyard. Trombone, an old fellow with grizzled moustache, he had watched from a boy’s standpoint—wondering how he knew where to check the valve with which he made notes. He knew now that he did not know. He knew that it was just guesswork on the part of Trombone, and that people who had ears quailed when he lifted the mouthpiece and drew in his lips ; but Haines did not say so. He recognized that “ See the Conquering Hero Comes ” without Trombone would be whisky-punch without lemon or sugar—so the crowd cheered.

Of course, he was the recipient of an Address—a curiously worded rhodomontade which set forth his exploit and would, perhaps, be interesting to his grandchildren, if it ever came to that ; but through the cheeriness of speeches one note rang out—the task which lay before England and the spirit of sacrifice which had blossomed.

Here was no cock-a-hoop stupidity as in London and elsewhere after the relief of Mafeking ; no hatred ; no boasting nor verbal gymnastics. Instead, the note of horror that a great Nation should have flung honour to the winds and sunk to the level of a pot-house bully. Then, when all had been said, when the band had again struck up and the procession had fallen in, there advanced upon Jag Haines a group of brass-headed firemen who took him in arms and carried him, uncomfortably, into the presence of a grey car which snorted at the edge of the crowd, and Haines found himself in the lap of his family.

He did not know the car was there, had not seen Dorothea’s handkerchief, nor his brother’s gold lace ; nor his father’s proud glance . . . nor Dick, his young brother, back from school to do him honour. It came upon him as the Address and the speeches had come, from the dim recesses of the unexpected—whence often arrive our most entrancing moments. Haines looked over his saviours and straightened his cap.

“ Some cynic,” he said, “ tells us that anticipation is the cream of all emotion ; but he is wrong. I was never so scared in my

life. Jove!" he put up one hand, "I haven't got a button to my name."

"Never mind the buttons, old chap," Jimmy crowed out. "There are some letters that will hold as well."

"Letters?" Haines fumbled, his eyes on his brother's smart cap.

"D.S.O.'s," Dorothea supplied.

"What?"

"Truth, dearest. That's what we went up to Admiralty for. Only it didn't come. . . . It's in a telegram that came just now."

"From the King," the Rector added, his face luminous.

"Lucky bargee!" said Jimmy as he opened a valve.

Haines stared; but the look in Dorothea's eyes acquainted him with the truth. He took off his cap and glared at the badge.

"Jove!" he said again. "I shall have to get a new rig . . . and that reminds me. I saw this in a window somewhere. It looked smothered—so I bought it . . . sort of In Memoriam, you know. . . . Whew! I am hot."

He handed the thing to Dorothea, who said, "It's a gem!" which was true.

The car ran through smiling crowds to the High Street and thence by way of Chart Lane past the Faith Woods before Jag quite recognized the direction.

"Where are we bound?" he asked.

"Willows," said Jimmy.

"What in the world for?"

"Tea," said Dorothea, "and I do want it." Then she captured his arm and tucked it beneath her own. "Yes," she said, watching him, "at Dad's request as well as Mummie's."

And again Haines lifted his cap and stared at the tarnished emblem of his Service. "Jove!" he said again, "I shall certainly require a new rig."

"Requisition for it," shouted Jimmy from behind a lighted pipe. "It might come off."

CHAPTER V

THE PENALTY

ALTHOUGH it did not mature for several days, the setback was in preparation even while Jag was doing his best to get out of the limelight.

He came over from the Rectory one morning with his news and caught Dorothea alone as he desired. With his arm about her waist, her head on his shoulder, he blurted his trouble as they stood looking out of the library window. "I was afraid of it, Doretta. The pendulum was bound to swing back." Then, as she looked puzzled, "I mean—er—it seems I've got the sack."

"Jag!"

She gave that little cry, then snuggled in his arms.

On the lawn beyond the terrace a peacock spread his tail and made love to the sun. The shadows were blue, the shrubbery over there on the right paved with nodding spires of blue, tall, aping the sky; a giant clump of iris clung to the curve as a terminal to the tender green of the farther shrubs—yet Haines frowned.

She caught that also and turned swiftly to banish it, her lips raised to his.

"I am wondering how in the world to explain it all to your father," he offered for her further enlightenment; "he will never understand!"

"Then why say anything?"

"Must. Just as I was beginning to crow, too," he joked grimly, "and Jimmy was pretending to envy me my livery!"

"No—no! I won't hear that . . ."

"Chances, then," he substituted, holding her.

"I know! He told me you had all the luck . . . and Dad only the other day said he was proud of you. He won't alter his opinion because these shipowner people choose to play up to the enemy. He will be as angry as I am, and"—she whispered, clinging more tightly—"just as helpless. No—no; don't go out yet. *Ma mie* is on the terrace and we must decide what to do . . ."

They leaned against the window-seat, their backs to the blue and green pleasance; Dorothea in the khaki-toned kit she wore at the C.I.D., Jag in his Service dress.

"It is the last thing I expected *really*, in spite of their hints," he said again. "I must resign, of course. I can't wait to be

kicked out. It would mark me for all time, and we can't afford that, Doretta."

"Does your father know?" she asked.

His abstract gaze at the floor vanished in a moment and a twinkle appeared. "Not yet," he said, "and when I tell the dear old man he will just rub his hands and say, 'Serendipity, my boy,' and prove it too. Really it is extraordinary when you think of it how many things come to one, when one is looking for something else. I shall be caught napping at my wedding yet," he joked, again searching her eyes and finding them beautiful.

They laughed, both of them, in spite of the tension; but it was easy to see Jag was wounded—wounded although this request for his resignation was precisely what Sir Douglas had insisted was essential to him in rather pointed phrase. It appeared to have slipped his memory. It was the acid of Sharums' demand that bit at the moment, nothing else; hence perhaps the singular aloofness which his father assigned to Serendipity.

The pressure of Dorothea's hand on his arm increased. "Not glum over it, my dear?" she whispered. "It doesn't matter two straws . . ."

"No—there are plenty of ships at sea. I must find one; but it isn't pleasant after being in command to go back to the mess-room."

"Would that be essential?"

"More than possible, anyhow," he replied, "after all this hullabaloo, too—that's where it stings. It makes one such a fool."

"No—no! I won't hear it."

"People who get the sack are always fools—with the mob."

"The mob doesn't count."

"In this case unfortunately it stands for the rest of the ship-owners. Where there is smoke there is fire . . . besides, there is the Black List, and there are millions of skippers"—he drew the long bow here—"all clamouring for command."

"Not D.S.O.'s, my darling," she put in to aid him.

"The Admiral would get me a billet in the Patrol Service—not command—but your father won't hear of that."

"No . . ." she hesitated, then swiftly said, "Let me see him. I will go up on my own. Do let me. There are lots of jobs at the Admiralty—Civilian, Organization, Publicity . . . all kinds. You might get one of them if . . ."

"Cushy jobs, Doretta . . . ? No—I can't see myself there . . . besides, I'm a sailor. I should 'stall' in an office . . ."

A voice interrupted, carolling brazenly in the hall—

"But she never, never looked at him again,
While he, poor fool, became insane,
Just tapped his brow and cried, 'The Lane!'——"

Then with leaden assurance a strong hand took the handle and turned it with the clang of a breech-block as Jimmy Haines stood laughing in the doorway.

"Hullo! you blighter. Come out and air your D.S.O.!" he cried. "They told me I should find you here—hidden, too, and it's blazing hot . . . just the day for open throttles. Come out!" He advanced, holding forth his hands to Dorothea.

"Sorry," Haines jerked. "It can't be done."

"Dud?"

"No—live. I must go to Town."

"Calling here *en route*. I see. What in the world for?"

"To see a man about a billet."

Lieutenant James, otherwise Jimmy Haines, "slowed," as he would have expressed it. Then he whistled and stood still, keen eyes searching the pair.

"*Dégommé*," he announced after the reading he had made. "But why?"

"Apparently a question of disbursements," Haines shrugged out.

"Why doesn't he put in a Paymaster—sorry! I lose myself in your slack ends—Purser to do his finance work? You are a sailor—know something about ramming U-boats, too, lucky beggar! Wish I did . . . hang it! join us. I'll take you on." He came near, brilliant in his Service kit.

"As stowaway?" Haines laughed.

"Right-o! What does Miss Nesbit think of that?"

"It isn't exactly promotion," she returned, "but he would have the protection of guns."

"Half-inch Harveyized shield," Jimmy corrected.

"Set at an angle to deflect bullets."

"But not shells, Lady Dorothea. Shells we dodge. Hear 'em coming a mile off . . . er"—he turned to face his brother—"the Owner know?"

"Not yet. I was going to tell him; but Mrs Jenk's baby had

lost its soother, and the Guv'nor was making out a specification for another. So I ran over here first. Got the car with you ? ”

“ Think I'm going to walk while I'm ashore ? Lady Dorothea, what have you been saying to this brother of mine ? ”

“ Telling him there are not many D.S.O.'s in the Merchant Service and it will give him a big push. ”

“ You believe it, too ? ”

“ Naturally. ”

“ Wish I did, ” said Jimmy, and for a moment looked serious.

“ But it will ! I am sure of it in spite of you and in spite of Jag. You are in league to run down the dear old Merchant Service. I am ashamed of you. I am ashamed of both of you. . . . ”

“ I'm ashamed of myself, ” said Jimmy. “ Now then, Sonny, chip in and euchre me. ” He appealed to his brother.

“ I get cold feet when I think of it, ” he replied.

“ Better have taken on the White Ensign, dear boy. The Red is sullied with money-bags and Chysers who talk of dividends, and shareholders . . . Chuck it and come over to us. I'll get you a billet. ”

“ Think I want to hear your opinion, ” Haines growled, “ of my Service ? And, as for joining yours, I put in my papers for a Commission R.N.R. years ago, when I was green and believed in myself. Then I sat down to wait. I waited six months. I waited eight. After that, as I had no answer, I wrote and told them to send back my papers as I wanted to use them for something else. ”

“ Yes ? ” Jimmy interpolated as his brother paused.

“ Two months later they sent 'em, ” said Jag.

“ And you put them in for something else ? ”

“ I said I wished to. ”

“ Comes to the same thing. What was it ? Tell Lady Dorothea. ”

“ I said that as they didn't seem to require my services I was applying for a billet as Commissionaire . . . at the War Office, ” Haines chuckled.

“ Jag ! You didn't, ” Dorothea laughed.

“ Ananias ! ” Jimmy pinned him down with the word.

“ To tell the truth, ” Haines agreed, “ it was Madame Tassaud's. I was very hipped just then. ”

“ And now he's a D.S.O., fat cheque in the bank, picture in

all the papers, and"—Jimmy whistled, pointing at the ceiling—"he's on his charger. That's just what I've always argued about this question of honours for the Merchant Service." He appealed to Dorothea, his eyes dancing, quite in the old way. "They can't stand 'em. They haven't the ballast, you see. Get top-heavy at once, Lady D., and come an unholy cropper in full view of the mob. Now, with us the boot's on the other stick. We take 'em on and look for more. We get strings of 'em; we know no Admiral is trusted afloat until he has the whole alphabet behind his name. And then he's gouty—worse than useless unless he's spoon-fed. So they make him a Viscount or some other sort of top-hole sinner and pass him in at the Gilded Door where he goes to sleep. . . . Come along! The sun is shining and we are wasting time indoors. I like your paternal mansion, dear lady, but I would rather be driving the Ford. . . ." He hummed it out. "I would rather be driving the Ford—over there," halted, and putting up his monocle, came close to his brother. "Hallo!" he said. "What's happened to your gorget patches, stripes and things?"

"I've cut them off."

"So I see. . . . But why?"

"Admiralty orders. No crowns for Merchant Service officers. Quarter-inch gold bands only. I'm getting my cuffs ornamented with bootlaces. There can be no mistake about them."

Jimmy dropped his monocle, his one affectation. "You are right there," he said. "It's the order of the boot." Then he ran. That showed his wisdom.

"He's splendid!" Dorothea laughed as they followed. "Come, let's join, and let the City go hang!"

"Right-o! It's your day—and if the worst comes I shall get into the R.N.V.R."

Dorothea, before opening the door, vowed it could not come. How could it? Were they not young? Had not Dad at last given his consent, patted Jag's shoulder and said he was proud of him? How, then, could difficulty ensue?

"Difficulty," Haines decided as they came through the hall and faced the spring sunshine, "is an invention of the devil to make us win. If things are only big enough we always win in the end. That doesn't trouble me. It's this kind of thing, this braid-and-crown order," he pushed out his cuffs, "and now my dismissal that get on one's nerves."

"I agree—they are unfair . . . but I prophesy——"

"Not now, Doretta," he begged.

"Yes—now, close in your ear with Jimmy like a thundercloud on the horizon." She pointed to the badged and gold-laced brother who damned in the car. "If Sharum dismisses you because you have won fame, you will have offers from other shipowners before the week's out."

"Right!" Jag laughed. "But Sharum won't dismiss me because I won a D.S.O., but because I sunk a U-boat when he told me to leave them alone."

Dorothea swung round to face him, stopping him in his walk. "Do you mean that Sharum sympathizes with Germany?"

"I think he has no sympathies of any kind. He is out to make money—pots of it; and if he can't make it by trading quietly here, he will make it by trading with the enemy. . . . There are any number like him. Hamburg backs them. The banks and the Kaiser back Hamburg, and we, in our merciful British way, buy their goods and take passage in their ships. We say they are better run than our own—but what we mean is that they are cheaper."

They came in silence to the car and surrendered to chance. "Let her slide!" Jag cried out. "We will lunch at the Devil's Punch Bowl. I feel savage enough to fight him if he is there."

Now the Devil's Punch Bowl, as all England knows, is at Hindhead, which is forty odd miles from Town and scarcely within range of the offices of those shipowners who, if Dorothea's prophecy were to come true, ached to place Captain Haines in charge of one of their ships.

But Jimmy made no objection on the score of distance. He said he was enjoying his last run, that the sun was shining; the Ford had been simply eating petrol while they talked, because he dared not switch off; and now as they came to the high road, glanced round to suggest—

"What about the Thirlestane?"

"Not to be beaten—let her hum!" said Jag.

And as they buzzed down the Portsmouth Road, messages were passing over the wires—one from Admiralty to Jimmy, ordering him to rejoin his ship, and one from the Eastern Steamship Company of Leadenhall Street, E.C., to Captain Haines asking him to call at their office.

But neither brother knew what was in store for him until the Ford clanked into the Rectory stable. Then the burnisher of

Serendipity, otherwise the dear old Padre, showed them their marching orders, written in schoolgirl characters on the flimsies to which they were becoming accustomed.

“*Sic itur ad astra!*” he said quietly. “I would that I, too, could go out and seek it with you.”

CHAPTER VI

QUO VADIS ?

THE telegram was from Lord Brusselton, the Chairman of the Eastern Mail Service, offering Haines the command of a new cargo liner then fitting out on the Clyde.

With the ink scarcely dry on his letter of resignation, the shock of dismissal still burning in his brain, with Admiralty Order T.0566732 admonishing him about crowns and the width of his gold lace providing additional irritation, Haines found himself with the offer of a new command : a new ship from the prince among shipowners. In some way, too, the papers had scented what stood over him, and a paragraph had appeared giving the views of the man in the street. More limelight, in other words, for a very modest gentleman.

One can recognize his elation. It would not be necessary now to seek any change which might disturb Mr Nesbit ; the R.N.V.R. could go hang ! He would get three months' leave—part of it no doubt spent at Glasgow, the rest with Dorothea. One can understand also how patient he became when the Padre eloquently ascribed the whole transaction to Serendipity, that mysterious and elusive force which provides men with things without the labour of seeking them ; and how he clucked when Jimmy, lieutenant in a Service which tricks out and trains its men *ab ovo*, decided it was Joss.

Jag Haines considered it in that light also. So many events come under the Supreme Hand with sailors, and on the morrow Jimmy had packed his bag and joyously gone to face them ; because to face Dorothea through any prolonged leave had become a strain. Joss, you see, in spite of its fatalistic ring, is a very potent force for sailors. It is one of which he is entirely unafraid, which sometimes aids him, cheers him on, urges him to play the game—and in war-time, when his number is up, directs the shell which shall end him.

There were other offers in Captain Haines' post-bag during the week, either of which it appeared would produce affluence. Jag and Dorothea chuckled together over them, then passed them on to the Padre, who chuckled because of the comedy they disclosed. But Jag never wavered in his decision. He accepted service in the Eastern Mail and was not interested in the drab trappings of the various businesses which offered him fortune in exchange for his "capital." Then one day came a letter of another kind, one he had long hoped for and now had forgotten.

Nevertheless he decided he must consult the family at Low Willows.

One afternoon, then, when April was drawing to a close, Jag entered the drawing-room displaying it. On the back of the envelope was the Board of Trade seal—surely a portent !

The peacock was strutting in his lordly fashion on a patch of sunlit lawn, spreading his tail feathers and halting to comb them in the way they should go. The astronomer was lying down to compare great things with small, after a particularly irritating field-day with the Volunteers, and Dorothea was helping her mother prepare bandages when Haines arrived. Sailor-like, he dived at once into the middle of things.

“Got it !” he exclaimed, triumph in tone and gesture. “Isn’t it wonderful luck ?”

“Got what, dearest ?” Dorothea smiled up at him, content whatever it might be.

“The billet you cabled they filled months ago.”

“Not the Examinership, Jag ?”

“Just that ! Imagine it ! No more sea, no more embroidered bags, or Mount Misery for a week at a stretch—no more going down Channel with a wet stocking round your neck and a galley fire . . .”

“The cook won’t let you use,” Dorothea supplied, sure of her addendum.

Mrs Nesbit glanced up from her occupation of rolling a bandage and said, “But surely it is unnecessary for a Captain to wear a wet stocking round his neck when the shops make . . .”

“Allegory, *ma mie*,” Dorothea smiled.

The lint slipped from Mrs Nesbit’s knee and rolled itself straight. Haines captured it and commenced to roll it ; but Mrs Nesbit claimed the task.

“I remember the time when I should have been jolly glad of a wet stocking, even,” he laughed. “When every blessed stitch had been swept out of the cabin and we had to get canvas and make ourselves jumpers . . .”

“Of canvas ?” again came the puzzled glance of the wife of one who dealt with facts. “Really ?”

“Sailors’ jumpers, dear—with big collars, you know, open at the neck and hanging over their shoulders.”

Mrs Nesbit smiled and methodically pursued her task. “That is the worst of it, my dears. I do not know, and I am afraid I am too old to learn. It took me years and years to obtain the

sketchiest knowledge of your father's work . . . conic sections, trigonometry, with logarithms and equations thrown in. So you see I am rather used up and quite incompetent to advise on these matters, so we will leave it, please, and Jag will tell us what it is the Board of Trade wishes him to do—then we will have tea.”

She finished the roll, secured it with a pin and leaned back in her chair.

“They offer me an Examinership : the job I applied for a year ago . . .” Haines commenced, and suddenly paused because Dorothea kicked his foot.

“He means that they offer the billet we applied for when he went out in 1914. It's one of the plums, you know. When you get to be Chief Examiner you are eligible for a Brother of Trinity House and on your way for a peerage. It is one of the tip-top Marine Department jobs and . . .”

“Is it a Government appointment ?”

“Certainly,” Jag put in. “I should be a permanent blight . . . I mean official, or a servant of My Lords . . . probably the latter, for of course they keep the biggest plums for the Shore Gang. . . .”

“The what ?” Mrs Nesbit shook out *in extremis*. “I am horribly stupid, but . . .”

“Clerk, *ma mie*, Government quill-drivers. Everybody belongs to the Shore Gang who is not a sailor.”

“How very interesting,” said Mrs Nesbit, but without sarcasm. “Yes, I understand. But you say the best appointments go to this Shore Gang . . . and”—she paused, with wrinkled brows and a shaken head, then added, “I think I had better know a little more of what is proposed before I venture to disturb the position as we arranged it. Forgive me. I dislike questions of this kind—but you will understand me, Jag ; you, too, dearest child.” She drew the girl's arm within her own and leaned nearer. “I want you to be happy. I want as little analysis and talk about money as possible, you know that ? Well, now tell me two things. First, where would your appointment take you, Jag ?”

“To Barry . . . in South Wales.”

“I see. A small town. A seaport ? No—I don't think I have ever heard of it. Ah ! me. I am afraid your father would not like that. And, you won't mind me asking, will you ? What salary goes with the appointment ?”

“Two hundred at first, rising by what they call ‘increments of ten pounds each year.’”

"But surely you are not considering that! It is so much less than your present pay, Jag . . ."

"About half," Haines acknowledged.

"I don't think, my dears, I would consider that. What are the duties? Are they important?"

"If I accepted I should be an Examiner, one of those who fail or pass candidates who come up for Examination as Masters and Mates in the Mercantile Marine . . . that is, the captains and officers of all the ships which are outside the Navy," Haines answered, flushing as the logic of the situation dawned. "My screw would be less than that of the majority of those I had to examine. Absurd!" He turned to Dorothea. "No can do! I stick by the Eastern Mail. It was the idea of a Government billet that induced me to speak of it. So—that's done with. I remain a sailor."

"Always?" Dorothea pleaded, recognizing the tone.

"Until you bid me join the Shore Gang, beloved," he answered, kissing the soft white palm that strove to muzzle him.

"I hate the Shore Gang!" she flashed. "They take all the plums."

Mrs Nesbit rose. "I will go and see about tea," she said. "Come when you are ready."

Haines reached nearer and drew Dorothea close. "You don't want me to take it on, do you?" he asked.

"Not unless you are keen," she whispered, nestling down.

"You see, it's a sort of cushy job—and . . ."

"I know. And you would hate it."

"In a way I should."

"Me, too," she crooned close in his ear, her head drooping. "And yet I should love to be with you always . . . and to know that you were safe." Her face sank lower.

The words passed his ears like a wraith.

. . . .

On the seventh of May Haines came down with a definite quarrel with his countrymen, or with the Government under whom they lived. Last night, on his return from Low Willows, he purchased a paper and, scanning it for news of the war, saw the headlines of a stupid fracas which had occurred at a music-hall in Town. A Volunteer officer, it appeared, had returned from a long evening's drill and gone to see the play. He was in uniform, in spite of the order made lately which forbade officers

or men of the Volunteer divisions to appear in any public place in their kit. An officer of the Army challenged the offender, took his name and rank and ordered him out of the hall. The Volunteer refused to go, and it was obvious from the report there had been trouble.

The incident was like a red rag to Haines, and he came down ready to challenge the Universe.

"If the idiots who rule us wish to increase the efficiency of the Service, let them honour it, not snub it!" he exclaimed, *J'accuse* in his tone.

He explained the situation and showed his hurts as the family prepared breakfast.

"Not long ago, you remember, they had the impertinence to refuse to serve me because I was in uniform which was a 'colourable imitation of the Navy.' And now they are turning on the Volunteers who are digging trenches and laying out barbed-wire defences to protect us against invasion. A man must starve, by George! after a field-day or work in the trenches. He mayn't go to a café, or dine at a restaurant, or go to the theatre until he has changed; because some ass said the Volunteers only joined up in order 'to swell about town in their kit.' For two pins I would challenge the fools to-night, go in my brassiest rig and make them run me in. . . . It makes me ashamed of my flag. It's like being in South Africa before the Boer war when every Englishman was called a *verdamt rooinek* . . . and——"

He broke off because Madge, his sister, who was a V.A.D. on night duty, looked up at him and said, "I can guess the meaning of *verdamt*, but that *rooinek* always did puzzle me. What is it, Jag?"

"Something you girls were trying to get before they put you in kit and made you use buttons," said her brother.

"Now that's rude and unfair," she decided, smiling; but she brought him his coffee and leaned over his chair to say, "What happened last night at Low Willows?"

"In what way?"

"About the Board of Trade appointment, you know."

He looked up, conscious at length that he was giving the whole show away.

"Yes," he answered, "I did—and I decided to turn it down."

"Then when do you join your ship?"

"On Thursday, my dear." He stood at the sideboard helping himself to bacon. "May I give you some?" he asked.

"Thanks, yes. One bit—but I'm glad you will still be in command. The other *is* rather a cushy job, isn't it?"

Haines made no comment. He brought her plate and placed it before her; carried his own round, sat and began to take breakfast. But the word remained with him. Exactly the word Dorothea had used; the word he had used himself . . . Cushy! Associated with the presentation of white feathers. Some one installed in a safe billet while others took their stand in the open. No! It couldn't be done.

A week later Jag Haines moved away north to join the *Vulcan*, to struggle with surveyors and watch the processes by which, even in war-time, strikes are engineered and set going. The experience had its uses. For one engaged in literature or in the House it would have been invaluable; but for a man aching to be on Active Service, so that he might have a smack at his country's enemies, you may set it down as purgatory.

CHAPTER VII

THE "VULCAN" SAILS

IT was blowing a moderate gale from sou'-west when the *Vulcan* cleared Ailsa Craig and settled in her stride for the south ; but Haines was buoyant as the weather was glum.

Spring had gone, summer was past, and a September of the grimmest had conspired to complete what the joys of a shipyard had left untouched.

He had endured four months in that great hive of the north we know as Glasgow, and had learned that he must continue as he had begun. England would emerge triumphant. She would recognize in that splendid hour how dependent she was on her Services. She would learn that if the Merchant Service had failed her the heroism of her Navy and her Army would have been in vain, and some day, if the veil were lifted, she might discover how nearly Germany had won.

Haines stared over the dodger. He had seen the months vanish as he watched the *Vulcan* blossom ; marked time while summer passed in a riot of clanging iron ; seen September creep in, the dark streets grow darker, and noted the spirit of unrest slowly grow formidable under the leadership of an enemy, subtle and relentless, in whom few believed. He had watched and prayed for the greater freedom of the open seas as his brother knew it in his beat off Sicily. He had been tied to this business of ship-construction at a moment when others were making history ; yet he continued to measure and verify and examine, to see surveyors and plead with foremen until it became possible to tackle the sea for a trial spin and September was well set.

One glorious fortnight of brilliant weather, alone of all the weeks he remained on the Clyde, was treasured as a memory. Then he had wired to Mrs Nesbit and persuaded her to come north with Dorothea while the astronomer was absent with a belated meeting of the Royal Society.

That alone compensated for the dull business of banging iron ; for the paint, the flares and the jar of pneumatic riveters. . . . Dorothea made a picture of it all, but was herself the centre, vivid, inspiring and marvellously interested in this world of ships. She said it fascinated her ; but Haines knew very well that it was the fascination of the unknown, even as it had been with himself.

All that happened long ago. Dorothea had vanished, the Clyde with its wonderful industries had vanished, and Haines walked

the bridge master of himself and of his ship, the shackles of docks and engineering flung to the winds. So far, indeed, was he from Dorothea and her beautiful enthusiasms that the uplifting days of her visit might never have been. There might be no Dorothea, no quaint Rectory garden, no Low Willows—for he was facing the sea in one of its unkind moods . . . the glum, grey sea which is our glory and our heritage ; the sea which Jimmy helped to keep inviolate and which now seemed to resent lordship at any hands.

Haines stared over the Dodger facing the drizzle which remained from the last squall, and decided it was scarcely the same drizzle as that to which he had become accustomed on the Clyde. There were no smuts in it. It licked his face with the sting of small shot, but it was clean, soft—water he could drink.

The ship dipped to a roller which came to greet her from the wind-swept space west and south of Tuskar. She lurched side-long upon it, quaking and scooping the seas. She was new and a little bewildered, it seemed, by the advent of immense top-weights. Hitherto these trials had been administered gingerly in a basin where the water was still and obedient to the laws of gravitation. Here, she faced something which advanced with the rush and gurgle of a mill-stream ; which had the force of a Nasmyth, the hum of a machine-shop, the clatter of a pneumatic riveter, the sweep of a rolling machine and the jar of something tremendous—perhaps a steam-navvy.

She put down her head considering these things and half the Channel rose in her path, fell upon her—and then noisily essayed escape. It was an experience !

She lifted to peer over the rim of her new world and found it curtained by the spray, the rain very difficult to pierce. Rivulets of brine streamed from her hawse, from the break of her fore-castle, from the look-out bridge. On every hand was water running in hills from the surrounding greyness, some steep, some long and low ; some capped with curling foam that snapped and fizzled as it swept past.

Her wake showed as a series of whirlpools, white and seething. On either hand was a cauldron which slapped her sides, leaped on board or fell back in a shower of iridescent cloud. Ahead was the leaden Channel whipping up its forces, urging attack.

Nothing this *Vulcan* had experienced hitherto in any way resembled it. It was a new world she had come upon, a strange, unlevel place full of the terror of sounds and forces ; a whistling

and sinister encirclement of macabre appearance upon which the clouds stooped as though they essayed to hide her. Then through the turmoil came a messenger carrying a chit which said—

“ 2.45 P.M. W/T

H.M.S. *Landrail* to *Vulcan*. Take your passage by Irish Sea. Make for a point midway between Tuskar and St David's Head. Signal when you reach objective and patrol will communicate.”

So—that was decided. Evidently the trouble in St George's Channel had been overcome. Destroyers had been busy in spite of the weather. A U-boat or two had been captured or sunk . . . perhaps other things had happened ; but there stood the message tabulated in the usual way, and Haines had no second thought as to what he must do on this day of bluster and growing gale. *Vulcan* made no to-do either. She thrust her nose into the seas boring her way thither. She could not ape the destroyer in speed or audacity ; but she could smother her bridge, her funnel and crew as well as a T.B.D. She could not twist and go off instantly at a tangent ; but she could get there in her heavy fashion. She could not pirouette as the lean cruiser with raked funnels and aerial-strung mast ; but she could give a very fair picture of the advent of a shoal of grampus, or a whale busy thrashing his way out of shallow water. Thus she kicked out in the greyness making for Tuskar.

Now, Tuskar is a lightship at one of those meeting-places of the channels, lying off the south-east corner of Ireland, past which in war days came the Neutrals to offer us wares. They sailed the seas under cover of a screen of flags painted so large the devil himself could have read them without glasses. Their name and the name of their country was painted between the flags in letters like a sky sign, and there were some whose sides were like a rainbow for colour, in the hope that Germany in her mercy might waive her power and pass them.

Only the grey ships of England were unadorned with flags or insignia, for camouflage was not for the rank and file as yet. Like bulldogs in hot weather, they butted the seas carrying a jaw full of foam, unmistakable, unafraid, all of a colour.

They came in groups and singly, staggering under vast loads as never before, carrying food and munitions, troops and passengers to the Homeland. In gale or calm they sprawled upon the

seas, a foam-line dwindling in their wake : foam at the bows, foam alongside, foam pouring in cascades from their decks. The men who manned them knew that they carried their lives in their hands ; yet never when her number was hoisted on sailing-day did a ship lack men.

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Abreast of Scilly one boisterous, sunlit morning—Tuskar you perceive, safely passed—the *Vulcan* came upon a Neutral more to her taste than some she had encountered. The Stars and Stripes were blazoned on her lean sides, her name—*St Paul*—standing in white lettering for the wrung matelots to appraise.

She came down wind, humming upon the *Vulcan's* course, to watch her leaping progress, the seas she received at each plunge and flung iridescent upon the day—then swerved and came close under the *Vulcan's* stern, dipping her ensign.

She need not have offered this courtesy. She had ample room ; she could have steamed round the staid cargo-wallah at half-speed, but her captain elected to give his passengers and crew an opportunity to declare their kinship. As she came close she slowed and the snap-shotters got to work. Then an officer took up a megaphone and cried through its brazen throat :

“ You are wet, Britannia. . . . I like your grit. You held the ring for us at Manilla, and,” as the cheers rang out, “ you'll have us with you when the time comes ! ”

And Haines, seizing his chance, acclaimed the liner friend. “ Speed the plough, Jonathan ! ” he cried in answer, “ the time is now ! ”

So they passed in the grey-green waters scintillating about Scilly, hands waving, flags at the salute, and Haines turned to his Chief who stood beside him.

“ America will come in,” he said, “ because she will be unable to keep out. Gad ! but that was spontaneous, anyhow ! ”

“ Right on the nail, sir ; but I should like to see her move more quickly.”

He alluded to America, not to *Vulcan*, which at that moment was occupied with the investigation of a roller which creamed high in the sunlight, meditating annihilation.

CHAPTER VIII

JOSS

THE Bay was in a gruff mood. It seemed necessary to test the endurance of this *Vulcan* who came sprawling upon it with her maw full. It may be that the lord whose supremacy was challenged by her plunging advent called to the Lord of the winds and bid him bury her ; or it may have been that the god of the wind-swept spaces looking down from his cloud-throne could see moving beneath him the new shapes which had come to torture and maim in his domain—strange, fish-like things which crept under sea and hurled lightnings which blasted the creatures which were his ; blighted the air and annihilated in red flame the ships which of old time moved peacefully on the surface.

Therefore he sent wind. Wind which should produce a sea, blind the eyes of those who lurked, and rob them of their spoil . . . or it may be that the God of all worlds had compassion, knew the power of this driving steamship and would have saved those who moved to save others who were unable to move.

Out of the dusk a child is born into the day which is bright and full of strange Forces—disease which may kill it, trouble which may mar its brain, accident which may rend it in pieces. And out of the mines and workshops of the dim north, cavernous places ringing with the note of Force, the *Vulcan* was born and set down to face the perils and happenings of the wilderness in a war period.

She was staunch, but she was laden and slow. She had a certain meed of buoyancy ; but she slammed as though she had none. She was big and heavy with the weight of Exchange, the principles by which an Island Nation lives—how heavy and near the border-line only those who have sailed in ships rightly know. With a greater turn of speed she might have escaped all peril, or she might have buried herself and her crew. These things are with Joss, who is the god of all sailormen, and they bow before his decrees recognizing his right.

A mailship traverses the Bay between Ushant and Villano in twenty hours, more or less ; but the *Vulcan* found herself still plodding on the morning of the third day, the gale still at its merriest, and Villano, which is near Finisterre, a long way sunk in the eastern haze. And here she met a cruiser, salt to the trucks, salt even to the “till of the Captain’s shaving-box,” as the men expressed it, who said on her wig-wag, “Pass Burlings

at twenty-five miles and, if it is quiet, whack her up all you can. Go zigzag abreast of the Islands. It's not healthy in their neighbourhood."

Then, after further talk, with chronometers checked and position verified, *Vulcan* was set spinning again and the cruiser resumed her beat—the wearing, heart-breaking beat of the Navy on war service.

"If those chaps don't vote for conscription and national defence in future," said Haines as he watched, "call me a Dutchman."

"Afraid they have about as much chance of voting, sir," the Chief replied, "as we have."

"Right. Chalk it up for the pow-wow."

"Which one?" the Chief tossed back, his eyes dancing.

"The 'after-the-war' corroboree. Shipping issues, section Y/Z 250061."

"Ah!" said the Chief, "near the end, sir."

"Very, very near . . . the position acquired by long custom—at the tail of things."

"It's the tail that wags the dog," the Chief reminded.

"But this is a tale, Mr Roper, that will wag the British Nation, the Allies, and bring the Americans from the fence . . . 'not healthy' in the neighbourhood of the Burlings! Remember that, and beside it chalk up the statement we had the other day—'The submarine menace is well in hand.' They don't look pretty together. One or the other of them is a terminological inexactitude, the point is which, for we are either going to obey instructions and pass the Burlings at twenty-five miles, or going to qualify the order and risk court-martial."

They held an impromptu conference on that and decided to carry on—which means that Haines was not more anxious than his officers for a keelhauling at the hands of Authority. If an "accident" is avoided at sea, it is even more difficult to prove that danger existed than it is elsewhere. Therefore they faced the two hundred and forty miles which lay between them and the Burlings at such speed as the gale permitted.

There was only a stiff breeze, and the Lord of the sou'west wind tired of continuous effort when the *Vulcan* crept into the zone which was termed unhealthy. North and east of her was the purple of a dying day, the clear solitudes which lay upon her home; south and west of her the deep chrome haze which one associates with the desert, and here was a wilderness of glowing

water, tossing, vibrant with the lap of seas. The horizon showed as a purple band girdling space, and through it crept smoke-like wisps and mare's tails, which billowed upon the gold.

When the sun dipped the ship's starboard side was brazier-like in its rays ; but before it vanished she had turned eight points to the east and said on her whistle, in short and long sounds " — — — " which is Morse for " I have encountered ice."

But there was no ice on the broad seascape she fronted, only the purple of a marvellous ocean etched with golden slopes and tracks leading criss-cross to vanishing-point ; a sea sufficiently turbulent to hide all lurking dangers.

It was nearly the end of the first dog-watch and the men on deck dreamed of tea and the taste of good tobacco. Three figures were on her bridge, two silhouetted on her look-out forward, a man in crow's nest and a pair marching to and fro the deck-house aft. Yet, in spite of the hour and the gorgeous pageant of sea and sky, the signal brought every man swiftly to his place for boat stations. Automatically they stood at attention, eyeing the changing wake, buckling lifebelts and preparing the boats' falls.

They knew that ice would not trouble them here ; but they knew of a more subtle deadliness, a concomitant of the war upon which they were engaged, and called grimly one to the other : " Submarines, old son ! Get into that belt of yourn an' shake a leg . . . "

" A leg ! " came back in contemptuous derision. " Listen to old spitfire up aloft ! "

He alluded to the wireless, not to the Cherub, as might seem possible.

Submarines ! They spoke as though they were accustomed to meet the things in schools, like bonito or flying-fish ; but all that the bridge had descried out there across the red disc of the sun was a short, blunt stake which, in other seas and in other times, might have passed for the dorsal fin of a shark lifting through the swell.

And up aloft the wireless spluttered out its cry for aid, for something which could move swiftly, twist on its heel and turn at racing speed. " S.O.S." it reiterated. " S.O.S. *Vulcan* bound south thirty miles sou'west of Burlings. S.O.S. . . . S.O.S."

And from the Atlantic came a voice which tapped out its message deep in the heart of the ship.

" Cheer-io ! " it cried. " I am on the way " ; and from the south one crying, " Keep me in touch with change of course " ;

while from the north, with gruff bonhomie, one said, "Right you are! Keep him busy!"

The men stood waiting, listening to old spitfire, tightening their belts. "Keep him busy!" the messenger chuckled as he passed on his way to the bridge. They were prepared for all hazards, knowing the Hun. They required small incentive to get to their posts, yet Captain Haines seemed unsatisfied when the Chief made his report.

"Two minutes," he commented. "Yes—not bad . . . but before we have done with these devils it will be one. Good! Keep them standing by . . . Can you see anything of that periscope?"

"No, sir. He seems to have submerged."

"I doubt it. It is dusk already. He will be after us at surface speed before long."

"Unless we can manage to shake him off," the Chief interpolated.

"In half an hour, Roper?" Haines smiled. "No can do. Unless," he added quickly, "we have the heels of him, which I doubt, we shall be facing the music in that time. God! I would give my right hand for a Q.F. at this moment."

"I agree, sir . . . why don't they arm us?"

"Some of the Neutrals object. They would bar their ports to us, handicap us with embargoes and turn on the lawyers . . ."

"Then I would force them open," the Chief decided hotly.

"I don't think you would, my friend, just now. We are rather busy as it is and can't afford to add to our enemies. . . . Besides, it would be playing Germany's game . . ." He twisted slowly, searching the glowing horizon; but the creaming seas and the growing dusk were fatal. "Not a sign," he announced. "Can't either of you pick him up?"

The two officers swept to port and starboard, with and without glasses. They replied in the negative. Nothing. It was blind-man's holiday and the U-boat supreme.

"Bring her round again!" was the order. "Starboard four points. Make sure we have no lights showing. Advise wireless operator. Boats to the rail—lower away!"

No pipes, no bugles, orders were passed from man to man as in the trenches, or by telephone. Noise was taboo, as well as light. With the sea as a sounding-board and the Blonde-beast with his ears at a hydrophone, quiet was essential; but you cannot still the thud of propellers and keep moving. In the

engine-room they were busy whacking her up. In fifteen minutes the drone of the boilers had become a roar, imprisoned but vocal. In twenty the aerials were spinning, and every shroud and backstay jiggling like the traces of a team clattering downhill.

The wind, too, had a new motif—as though the spirit of the air recognized the ship's peril and whistled its warning.

"Over there!" it seemed to say. "Skulking . . . the top of her conning-tower awash . . . have a care . . . a care!" Then from the Atlantic called a companion spirit: "Manœuvre so as to bring him astern and come away nor'-west. . . ."

Haines acknowledged this and said what he would do, knowing full well that life or death, gallantry or cowardice, was in the lap of the gods.

Half an hour ago they had faced a breeze from sou'-west; now as they ran north it was calm, and clinkers from the funnel showered the bridge-deck. It was dark, too—blind-man's holiday a thing of the past; all odds on the U-boat, unless for some reason the thing had gone to sleep.

It appears simple to those who do not know the sea to trick or dodge in some way the attacks of these devils of the underworld; but Haines knew that it was difficult. Speed determines the whole problem, the ability to twist and move. If this U-boat had the legs of him, he was aware that sooner or later he must come under shell-fire—and the *Vulcan*, despite her flag and splendid equipment, was slow, a carrier of the Nation's supplies.

In daylight a steamer is discovered by her smoke-cap . . . a U-boat shows only the tip of her periscope. At night smoke again discovers a steamer, the glow of her funnels if she be driving . . . a U-boat can lie on the surface, a mere plank which the darkness effectually hides. Unless she carries guns and a searchlight a steamer is always at the mercy of a U-boat, and Haines knew it; so, too, did the officers and the fifty odd men who made up the ship's company.

They crept onward, zig-zagging towards the north, dinging these facts; singing a threnody to the sea's rolling monotone; chaffing, hope definite and abiding, while, all the time, the gaunt sides of iron *Vulcan* blocked the seascape giving them the lie. It was dark. Submarines, they decided, go to sleep o' nights like folk ashore, if they are tired . . . and knew better. This one, it appeared, had gone down to think things out, perhaps to talk with Berlin or have a game of nap, and would trouble them no more. They affected to believe this syllogism and advised each

other that the old man would do better to head back to the south, or give them the stem. Submarines hate the stem, hate it, they argued, listening to the dull throb of the engines, marking their stress.

They refused to consider the chances of getting "put out." It would be about as useful to the enemy as if they were nipped in a railway accident. They decided that the only way to go out was in a fight . . . "footing it," was their phrase, "with a blighter they could see."

Then some one pointed. "What's that?"

The night was as it had been since their enemy appeared. Whatever it was, it moved beside them. A message ran the usual gamut and reached the bridge bereft of sting. The bridge used its glasses and shrugged. Shadows . . . shadows.

If they had possessed a quick-firer at that moment they would have loosed off a round or two to test it, precisely as Rodjesvensky when crossing the North Sea used shot and shell on British trawlers, arguing they were Jap destroyers out to give battle.

"Keep him astern!" quoth the voice from the north. "I am coming . . . if you have any nets, drop them overside, they may foul his propellers. . . ."

The bridge acquiesced; but it had no notion where the enemy was, whether he pursued or whether he drowsed. Haines decided that the only thing he could do was to keep zigzagging and come up with a patrol.

Then, with very little diffidence, at four points on the starboard quarter the U-boat suddenly opened its searchlight; focussed, swept the bridge, funnel, masts and went out.

The men who faced the glare were dazzled by it. The night was black before, now it was strung with a thousand dancing gleams. Haines, with his hands lifted to shut out phantasmagoria, crossed and stood beside the wheelhouse.

"Hard a-port!" he ordered. "Right round with her! Astern full speed on starboard engine!"

An officer slammed over the telegraph and took up his glasses. He, too, was blind . . . but a scratch drew near, broadening as it came. As a fish flashes through a phosphorescent sea, so this thing drew its comet-like wake on the blackness.

"Torpedo on starboard beam, sir!"

A dozen voices proclaimed it. Haines lifted his hand.

"I see," he answered. "Full astern starboard engine!"

He stood watching his ship swing as on that occasion off Cape

Bon. But the *Vulcan* was slow . . . slow. "Joss!" he gave out to the bridge at large.

He stood straddle-legged to see the approach of the end, if it came to that, with the flush and dry throat of one who recognizes death when he sees it.

"Get down!" he ordered. "Cover, all hands!"

He stood waiting.

The thing came without faltering, straight for the ship's vital section as she swung away. It found its mark with a deep-toned roar, a geyser-like sea which rose alongside and swept the decks with planks and splintered steel, limbs and the scattered oddments of modern war at sea.

And the night looked down upon the swirl with the calm serenity of one at peace with all the world.

CHAPTER IX

“ TARGETS ”

WHEN Haines was able to focus events he discovered that in some way he had become jammed with a wrecked medley of iron and wood on the starboard side of the bridge. He found, too, that he was unable to move. He was wet and his head bled slowly—otherwise it seemed he was unhurt.

He leaned out and looked down. The ship quaked, and from the pit he faced came a vast sucking, the noise of a partially opened sluice. He searched his limbs as he noted this, marvelling they were whole. But he could not move. Wreckage came slithering down the deck upon him, adding to the burden that pinned him.

A pair of binoculars left the navigation table, struck him on the knee and fell into the pit. He stared after them, noting his loss till the rasp as of a circular saw driven at an immense speed impinged upon his faculties. It ripped shrilly, gaining voice, and the far side of the bridge tilted as though subject to its power. How still he was, how numb, only those who have faced death can understand. The Pale One stood over him, threatening him—yet he made no sound. Suddenly he perceived his position. He was in command. Sixty men existed somewhere amidst this turmoil of noise and falling gear, men who awaited orders which had not been given. He cried out at this, his tongue freed, “Lower away all . . . Every man for himself . . .” and halted, listening.

No answer came to relieve him, but the ship lurched, breaking piecemeal amidships. He strove to bend back some of the iron that girdled him and slowly won a measure of freedom; then, when the end seemed very near, a greaser, sweating and bloody from his hurts, slid towards him like one coming down a chute. The ironwork caught him and he dangled close, his legs pointed for a plunge. Haines managed to clutch him and shouted encouragement, but the man looked back with a grin.

“She’s doon,” he said very plainly, swaying and plucking at the neckerchief he wore. “The side’s ripped oot of her . . . she’ll no last a minute. I’ve seen . . .”

He got one leg over a rail and released his clutch as the ship heeled over more steeply.

“Hear the sea at her!” he laughed, with a cackling choke. “It’s aboot the last look we wull get at it . . . sae tak’ your fill.”

He strained at his neckerchief, pressing it higher about his

throat, while Haines strove to draw nearer, to free himself of this clinging tangle of iron and steel and wood.

"Give me a hand to get clear," he urged, "then I can help you."

"Recht!" came in response, and the man fell upon the jumble, tearing piece by piece and thrusting all to the sea. He talked as he worked, yet he was dazed; he had the strength of ten, yet he appeared concerned solely with chatter.

"You should hae seen oor Chief," he spluttered, the blood like froth on his lips. "He and five or sax ithers wass standin' taegither conseederin' a gauge which was no working cannily . . . an' in twa ticks they wass blown tae reebons. Hech! They engineers hae no sort of chance . . . just reebons!" He laughed, grimly reminiscent. "An' all the platters, cups an' spoons fra the mess-room, wi' pickles an' jam ta make ye lick your lips, came tumblin' doon to splay about the stokehold plates for them tae yaffle . . ." He bent a bar with a thrust of his foot and turned half round, emphasizing his speech. "Chief's head went dingin' across after ae pot of pickles . . . there wass arms, too, legs wi'oot feet, hands wi'oot arms—all away dancin' panjandrum up an' doon, doon an' up . . . then . . ."

He broke off to stare over his shoulder as steam leaped with a roar from a ripped pipe. He seemed about to dive, to fling himself into the pit seething and triumphant beneath him. Then Haines took a firmer grip of him, steadying him. "Go easy!" he shouted, "or you are done. Quiet!"

Steam leaped upon the words, drowned the chatter of this man who was engrossed with reminiscence; stilled the shouts of those who far off were engaged on *sauve qui peut*. He strove to thrust back a grating, blood welling with the strain, and Haines, free at length, reached forward to help.

"Get your arm over my shoulder," he ordered. "Cling on and I will get you to a boat."

"You're my skeepie," came the answer. "I'll tak' an eengineer's chance . . . thee only one they get . . . up here." He glared from under pent brows. "Gae on yooour own . . . I'm bonny," he asserted.

Then suddenly he seemed to lose fire. He drooped and stood supported by Haines' arm.

The *Vulcan* heeled abruptly. It appeared that her bow rose on one hand, her stern on the other. The deck towered over them here, a flat well of water rose to face them. The sea sucked down

there in the pit as a stream sucks at the approach to a sluice. It gobbled and hissed in splendid jubilation. It had won. In a moment the ship would roll over and man would succumb. From far off came the shout of those who lowered and rowed boats ; but these two were trapped in a complicated V-section which changed shape and extent at the sea's bidding.

The man drooped on Haines' arm. A child of the engine-room who had no chance, who stood with those who ordered him, to obey gong signals, switch on lights, pumps, fire—all in obedience to the bridge who lorded it over them and left their deeds to silence—what would Haines do ? He seemed unconscious of their relationship, preoccupied with the ill-fastened muffler which was tied about the man's bloody throat. He strove to adjust it, wound about it a neckerchief he had taken off. He did these things subconsciously, knowing only that the ship was failing them.

"Hold still !" he commanded, and the man acquiesced. He became very still. "Let me fasten the end or you will bleed to death . . . not a chance in the world."

The binnacle torn from its bed on the bridge crashed past and fell against the wall.

"A clean shave !" commented the greaser, and again he chuckled. "You . . . you sould hae seen they pickles," he returned to that, "an' jam wi' all they bits o' . . ."

Then the ship rolled over and flung them together upon the wall which towered in the dark . . . flung them straight and settled down to roll upon them.

In the distance was a thing that spluttered red flame upon them, throwing shells which pitted the sea, flinging geysers.

CHAPTER X

AFTER

A WHISTLE screamed through the night, a short sharp note ; then a voice cried out, "Avast rowing! Lay on your oars!"

Silence ensued. Darkness and the silence of sluggish seas which rose and fell in black shapes on every hand.

Three boats gradually lost way, three small shapes carrying men on the brink of the pit, men breathless and panting from their fight with the swirl. They leaned on their oars, wringing water from their hair, their shirts, their eyes, and staring furtively now at each other, now at the sea.

"That you, Bill?" one questioned in monotone.

"Wot's left of me," said his chum. "Where's that blighted pirate?"

"Gone 'ome to see 'is gell."

"Gawd put it in 'er 'eart to cut 'is bloomin' wizen!" prayed his chum.

The sea rose and fell, pushing the boats nearer the stars, dropping them stupidly in the hollows. It was cold. All light had gone from the sky, only a red smudge lay in the west, a blur which might perhaps have been the glow of a furnace dying with the day. Some one shivered, and his oar jangled. It was dark. They had come from the jaws of death and now might slowly and without undue fuss acknowledge the Pale One's call. They had seen one of the small boats which carried them cut in two by the rush of their enemy, heard the scuffle and splash of those who leaped for safety; the laugh which only a German can find, and had escaped—scatheless. They had seen red flame dart from the throat of a gun trained upon them as they scattered, heard the shells scream past and had emerged—scatheless, something inert and confused, from their experience as targets.

They had seen the horrors of a swirl dotted with the tossed-forth impedimenta of their home, the crash of buckets, planks, gratings and all those oddments which in twilight take the shape of a man's head or arms and sometimes are . . . They had seen these things and had been compelled to get out swiftly, lest they, too, should become oddments.

For that is the law of *sauve qui peut*, the new order of quittance for those who can hear and obey.

The boats lurched sidelong upon lumps which rose and fell carrying them in their grip. They drew together in obedience to

the command of one who had assumed control. And when they were near, a voice speaking through the dark asked :

“ Is Captain Haines there ? ”

Some one repeated the question, and the answer came from each boat in turn :

“ Not here, sir.”

“ Seen anything of him—anybody ? ”

A voice droned out :

“ Ee was on the bridge wi’ me. Jammed in a twisted buckle o’ rails and oddments. I helped to get ’im clear an’ we got out w’en she wer goin’ . . . an’ then ah see no more o’ Cap’en ’Aines.”

“ Had he a lifebelt on ? ”

“ Aye, he ’ad that. He ’elped to fasten mine. We worked ’ard . . . ou aye, we worked. I’ve got the muffler on ’ee strupp’d off ’is froat an’ tied round mine—see ? ”

He fingered the thing, using the fag end to sponge his lips.

“ Who is speaking ? ” demanded the voice.

“ Raffles, sir . . . donkeyman that was. . . ” He leaned forward, gulping.

He was in the Chief’s boat. How he got there he could not have said even had he been whole ; but he was no longer whole. He moved by stages to the end of all things, quieter after his plunge, more coherent—that is all.

“ Anyone seen anything further of Captain Haines ? ” questioned the Chief.

No one had. The darkness, the swirl, the spitting shell-fire had made that impossible. It was decided, upon this, that the three boats should head back to sweep the seas for those who were missing. On a rough computation it appeared twelve or fifteen were unaccounted for. Perhaps they still fought amidst the oddments, perhaps they had ceased to fight. It was necessary to discover this—therefore the word was passed to give way.

The boats moved but slowly. High-sided, heavily laden, they crawled whither an hour ago they had scurried like frightened tern. They searched for a space which should be marked by oddments and failed to discover it under the stars. They searched when a thin moon stood over them to aid them with her cold beams, and still seemed far enough away from success. They lay on their oars and rowed in turn till dawn appeared in the east ;

but the oddments, if ever they bobbed and leered, had vanished even as the U-boat which had made them oddments.

And with the dawn came wind.

“Down sail!”

It was the Chief who spoke as they danced at a crested sea which moved upon them, the officer who for twelve hours had been in command of those who were left to obey. The boat plunged suddenly as the sail came down and a high curl of spume rolled level with the gunwale on either hand. It rose gurgling out of a vast expanse which hissed and boomed beyond the ken of those in the boat. It came down upon them charged and spitting white spindrift in the faces of those who still fought and prayed for a chance to make good. It came with a whirl of wrath out of the north-east, hail in its keeping, and should have wiped both men and boat into the beyond; but with the dropped sail all pressure ceased, the boat no longer charged, the sting of antagonism had gone out of her and she was tame.

The sea made a great point of this as it ambled about the boat lurching and oscillating upon its breast. She was conquered. It came swiftly out of the void and sprang to make an end of her, yet she floated and the men who were in her gave back the brine she had filched as it passed. The sea made no demand for repayment. There was so much in its keeping already. Yet the men baled, baled, as though their lives depended on it, and the sea flicked at the buckets they used, striving to whip them into the void.

The squall passed, and the voice of the officer said:

“Hoist away again there, bo’sun. Let her have it!”

Then the sail climbed slowly half-way to the masthead and remained spread, bellying and banging in turn. A shower of ice-cold spray acknowledged its return to power. The men shivered with hunched shoulders beneath it. It was wet, cold. The food they had with them in the boat was wet before they could eat it, sodden, cold; they drank half a pannikin of water, and that too was cold.

There are so many things lacking in an open boat at sea that food or drink, even if it be flavoured with brine, is called a God-send. To-morrow, if it dawned for them, would see their breaker empty. After that only the sea would remain to beguile them, torture them and make them mad. There were forty-five men

distributed in the three boats, and upon them the sea was free to experiment. The boats were strung out in line, perhaps a mile apart, heading on an agreed course. If one were sighted and her crew rescued, a search for the others would ensue. So ran the argument.

Far off at sundown on either hand lay the two craft which accompanied the Chief and obeyed his rule. The wedge-shaped sail which fluttered in the east failed first ; its counterpart in the west loomed like a purple dab oscillating against the red sky. Sometimes neither were visible for minutes on end, sometimes both lifted, fluttered and sank as with one sea.

Again came the order—"Down sail!" the frenzied thrash of it, the wet gleam and dance of a sheet hauled swiftly taut. "Snuggle her!" followed, and men who were weary and wrung and wet to the skin lay over it upon the thwarts, gripped it lest any corner should escape to incense the squall as it passed.

It boomed over them in the half-light while the Chief plied his sweep in the stern. A sea raised head as it came and rolled hissing from the shadows. It rose gurgling and took the boat on its breast, swaying her, and part of it leaped the gunwale and creamed on the bottom-boards.

"Bale! Bale! Whip it out of her!" the Chief commanded, labouring with the sweep to keep her straight.

And the men baled, noting the sudden halt, the staid solemnity of their progress down there under stars which already were veiled ; the risk they ran if it became necessary to hoist the sail once more. They jabbered, brooding on this as they lay upon it—and as though in answer there came the Chief's terse command . . . "Tie it up! Hold! Make a screen of it," he ordered, searching the darkness for a clue and finding none. "Put the sea anchor over, and pay out your line. Check her on it . . . check her!"

The boat swerved at a sea as they obeyed, plucked at the line and buried her nose in the brine. Again she swam giddily, full to the thwarts while men with balers and caps worked to free her. They crouched on the bottom-boards, wet to the eyes, shovelling water upon the sea, returning its gifts, anathematizing its potency. And when presently the line was at full stretch the anchor held her up to face her enemy ; an oil bag fastened midway upon it robbed the sea of its sting, cheating it of victims legitimately snared.

The sea snarled over them hungry to be done with this episode. It drove them steadily back towards the heart of the Atlantic they had fought and so frequently conquered. It remembered the score which was against it, the subtlety of those mannikins who now lay snuggling beneath a sailcloth, wet, shivering, cold at their vitals, cold numbing them ; their limbs water-sodden and swollen by the washing it provided. It leered up there in the dark, and sent squalls which should have drowned them, there, where they sagged at its feet . . . yet they moved, baled when it became necessary, and obeyed always the voice of the Chief who steered and watched, waiting, praying for day.

So they lay through the night, numbed and with failing strength while the sea drummed past striving to silence them. But it did not silence them. It made them angry. Young Roper, Chief now of a draggled-tailed squadron of boats lurching miserably in the wilderness, inspired with phantasy. In the still watches of that night he had become numb. He was uncertain whether he had feet or thighs. A curious immobility assailed him, and he looked out at the sea with the suspicion of one upon whom the wrath of the gods has fallen. The malevolence it showed was appalling. He scarcely recognized in this brute attitude the sea which had been his glory and his delight. He stood up fumbling with his oar, vigilant to meet all changes with a thrust of his hand, a twist of the blade—automatically carrying out the duties he had learned. But in his heart sometimes he sang, sometimes crooned as others have . . . “How long, O Lord ! How long !”

He saw a break in the mistiness towards dawn and leaned staring, a vision of the Eternal Throne in his eyes. He saw a glint, as of spray, or mist, or sheen, and visualized the Heavenly Host, descending, white and gleaming, to give him sustenance. Then he laughed and grew quiet in turn, his eyes on the Heights.

He listened and heard voices chanting, the far-off, modulated swell of chorus of diapason grandeur, the song of the ages vibrating in that flung-out group . . . then, in a moment it seemed, the Heavens were shut, the Throne vanished and out of the black night came a blinding squall to greet him, mock at him, bury him.

He turned upon it awake again with its sting and flung back blow for blow. The boat had fallen off—he brought her to. Hail bit into his flesh, he drank of its bounty. Salt sprays rose to

flavour this gift ; he caught hail in his mouth and drank and drank and drank.

In the midst of this turmoil it seemed that he was engaged in a duel, a fight with some power whose identity he was unable to discover. That it was of Hell, of the Pit—a war in which his puny strength for a time combated the world. The Kaiser loomed through this ; the drawings he had seen took shape and became real. The grim and sinister jowl with its upturned moustache stood over him admonishing him the end approached. He flung that back.

“ Lie ! Lie ! ” he chanted, revelling in antagonism, delighting in it. “ Devil, if you prefer a name, Pirate ! . . . a thing who sneaks about the sea and calls it his ! ” He crowed over this. It was sublime ! “ Think you are going to out us . . . all this little lot ? ” His eyes moved over the stirring forms beneath him. “ Lie ! You are not the man to do it. . . . I’d like to meet you single-handed . . . ”

Then quite suddenly he became still. He leaned upon his sweep, and the bo’sun, who had risen with the rest at the sound of his voice, came over and took the thing from him.

He was tired, that was all—and the Pale One, waiting near, presently stooped over him and carried him whither others had gone before.

.

Again dawn broke over the boat. She was alone now, her companions vanished. The bo’sun who steered could not have said whether the sea had swallowed them or whether a passing vessel had picked them up and failed to search for the others. He was a slow man, unlettered, accustomed merely to the ship-board round, not given to dreams or visions, as was the case with the Chief.

He heard him calling out, singing as he put it, and rather wondered what was wrong. He put his head out to see ; but it was dark, and before it grew light the Chief had caved in. There was foam on his lips when he collapsed—the bo’sun wondered why.

He explained these things to those who could consider them as they stood questioning what was to do. Some one said, “ No use keepin’ ’im ’ere . . . got to be dumped sooner or later, ’aven’t he ? ” That settled the matter. A man who can do no work at sea were better dead, and when dead, better out

of sight . . . yet they considered it strange he had gone so suddenly.

They took counsel with the bo'sun on whom leadership devolved and filled an empty breaker with salt water, tied it to his feet and put him over. They supposed it would sink him ; but it acted as a buoy instead, and for hours the body swayed and oscillated in the spume, pointing the way they would go.

With daylight the sun came out, sweeping the sky of cloud, and they discovered the water which had been treasured over night was no longer drinkable. That made them swear. To appease their just wrath the bo'sun proposed breakfast, and they ate their remaining ration. After that they found the wind had drawn more easterly ; that it was bent on pushing them west when they desired to go east. They remembered that an east wind has as many lives as a cat and that each reincarnation is more vicious than the last. They did not put it in these words, but the result is similar. They discovered that the wind snapped upon them with the sting of a spring gale, searing their faces, parching their lips, blinding them with the spray that smothered them.

All other dangers so far they had overcome ; but this they could not tame. The dark, the squalls of sleet and hail ; the driving seas and huddled misery, the too little food and drink, were all put down in one way or another ; but the spray remained. They were sore, raw about wrists and knees and feet ; their legs so swollen they could not stand ; they were at the end of their tether but did not perceive it ; yet the spray alone ranked as an enemy—one they must conquer. It drove over them from a brazen dome where a mad sun reeled drawing swift arcs in heavens which once were staid.

Their lips became so dry they cracked and bled. At noon men recognized it was dinner-time and found bits of leather for the meal. They chewed like beasts lying down amidst the stubble, and told each other they were in for a high old time and must stick it. If no boat came their way it was all U.P. and no eyewash. A pipe, they decided, would be Heaven, even a fag . . . a drink the last gift of God, and quavered " Stick it ! Stick it ! " as though the iteration of that euphemism in some way alleviated the pangs they endured.

Then one of their number bid them mark time with " Cheer-io ! " a faint parody of the shout he had produced in the *Vulcan's*

fo'c'sle and drummed on the thwarts as he sang. A thin, thin voice held them, proclaiming the old shibboleths, quavering over them, as in the trenches men talk and sing while facing death and dismemberment :—

“ You've 'eard of Piccadilly
An' found it bloomin' chilly,
An' wished you're back agen in Lime'ouse road ;
Or steppin' it in Wapping
Wiv Molly in 'er stocking
An' nothin' nigh yer 'ead as can explode.”

That livened them, and they joined in chorus as the chantyman desired :—

“ O we're goin' for to win,
To chalk up goes of gin,
Stand upon our 'eads an' kiss the gells ;
So you needn't talk of Kaisers,
Or any such-like Chysers,
But twangle on yer 'arp an' bang the bells.”

Again the voice trailed on, weak in spite of the trust he described :—

“ O once w'en I were 'oly
I give a roly-poly
To the gell as I was muggin' in 'er 'ome ;
And she caught me by the necktie
An' banged me in the left eye—
So I took the tip an' left 'er for to roam.

So you needn't talk of Kaisers
Or any blighted Chysers,
But twangle on yer 'arp an' bang the bells ;
For we're goin' up aloft
W'ere the clouds is nice an' soft
An' we'll stay there . . .”

A pause ensued. The men looked one at the other—a curious, under-brow gaze eloquent of their straits—and heard amidst the jumbled sea-clamour the note that sometimes passes unregistered.

There was silence in the boat for perhaps half a minute, then the singer completed his stanza :—

“ Till—the world is tired o' shells.”

The voice trailed more steeply. The musician of the starboard watch closed eyes and seemed to sleep. He smiled there resting

against his pal, and presently one drew a handkerchief across his face as he leaned back beneath the screen.

"Gawd! It's cold!" said he who had performed this task.

"Talk, some one!" cried a voice. "Talk, or I shall go dotty!"

One looked round furtively and perceived reason.

"There was gells in the boat," said he, "when I'm last torpedoed. Four of 'em, bright an' good they was to us. They sung to us—we rowed for them. Lucky it was calm—sung about Gawd an' Angels an' things you hear in church . . . only it was Gawd's truth she sung, not kid. So I promised w'en I got 'ome, if ever we did, I'd take a look at the inside of the first church I fell up against. An' it were St Paul's . . .

"There's a Service goin' on, an' I made tracks to back out; but a cove with buttons an' a gown an' a pole in 'is hand took holt of me an' said, 'Come inside.' So I went inside an' 'ee marched me up the gangway an' said I might sit down. So I sot—fer I was tired an' my feet drawn by the pavements. Then he gave me a book—a Church book, for I see the cross on it, an' I found the place he pointed an' set out to read . . . but Lord! I couldn't tackle reading w'en there was so much to see, an' presently they begun singing back o' high gates an' I couldn't do nothing but listen. . . . It was soft an' fine with a rolling going on deep underground an' bugles an' fifes—a reg'lar band, only I could see no band. Then some one began to sing—I don't know who . . . perhaps it were a gell—perhaps a boy, but it made me back creep and me 'air go bristly . . . just like when them gells was singing to us in the boats . . .

"I thought I was back in them, an' they was back in 'em too, an' I looked round to see . . . but——"

A sudden shout brought them all weakly to attention. It was the bo'sun's voice hailing; the bo'sun who an hour ago had surrendered the sweep to a leading seaman.

"Steamer ahoy! Ahoy! Out of it, there, an' give it lip!"

They pushed forward as one man and strove to stand, but succeeded only in the effort they made. They saw the bo'sun, still burly and active, waving a rag as the boat lurched under him. They heard his demand and joined in the clamour:

"Now then! To-gether!" He waved his arm. "Ahoy! Ahoy! Steamer ahoy!"

They shouted in unison, making poor jets of sound. They shouted with hope throbbing and again as the vessel moved sedately past, with courage ebbing. They realized at this moment the insignificance of their appeal. They realized what an atom they presented amidst the rolling sweep of seas which hemmed them. They saw that only a miracle could save them, and, as the gaunt craft laboured by, they remembered that the age of miracles is past.

How was it possible to give credence to wonders at the hand of a machine which pushed through the seas with a curl of foam in her teeth ? They remembered that a drifting boat is sometimes a decoy.

And when the steamer was gone they remembered that presently it would be dark.

It was cold. The knowledge that some shivered brought them close. Those who were not on watch crept beneath the screen, listened to the slap of seas, to the rain of spray, to the drone of the gale. Those who watched faced all three, hope gone, laughter forgotten. One who had forgotten wisdom leaned over lapping water which he dipped from the sea.

In the presence of that mischance it seemed immaterial what he did.

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Night. The wind booming, the seas mere foam-stretches through which the anchor line twanged and cut in swishing strokes. Night, and a figure climbing slowly aft, singing a new dirge.

A man came there bereft, grinning. He did not know he grinned. His brain was charged by hallucination. He dreamed that water existed there, where the bo'sun again kept watch. Water, he knew, was his necessity. Without it, in a day, an hour, a minute, he might become mad. He rolled his head considering these factors and advanced through the shadows gripping a knife. He was busy with the jumbled song he sang, tuning it to the pitch struck by the wind, laughing when it rose to a shriek, humming deep in his throat when it lulled. He did not know he hummed or laughed, or crept along gripping a knife ; yet he did these things with the plodding patience of one who walks in his sleep.

He came to the stern-sheets and the bo'sun challenged at once—
“Stand still !”

"Mit a hook!" the man announced, growling, his song dead.
"I do wot I lige."

"If you come another step I'll drop you!" said the bo'sun.

"Drop? So!—that is water . . . I want water. I 'ave it too—effery bit. Why you don't share it lige man? Drop? No—I 'ave all . . . all!" he raved his demand and sprang, the knife lifted to strike.

A shot rang out and the man reeled, tripped and fell.

The sea leaped greedily to cover him.

Some one beneath the screen shouted at this, demanding to know what chanced, and the bo'sun answered:

"Stick it like men or chuck it! That was Antonio . . . mad, going to cut my throat seemingly. Stick it like men, or say the word an' we'll go together. I'll have no knife play here. . . . Now—what is it to be?"

And word came back to stick it.

So the hours passed—hour after deadly hour; minutes which were days, seconds when Eternity yawned. Sometimes squalls raved over them, sometimes there came a lull; and every moment was crammed with peril, cold, wetness, misery. The sea played with them as it plays with the shingle on a beach—pushing them now, trickling them back, coming at them again with a rush so vehement that they jangled and lost all sense of direction.

They were like atoms in the laboratory of a scientist, to be bottled and separated and transplanted at will. They were the pawns in a game of chess, pushed out in defence, sacrificed so that the Queen, who was their mother, might live and breed more citizens for Empire. They were souls, too, in the keeping of Most High God, who has said, "I am the Light of the World," and "He that believeth in Me shall not die, but have everlasting life."

. . . .

When dawn lifted again upon the boat, three men were found who would want water no more, five who might hear the rain of spray for a space, two who were able to endure still longer. The rest crawled out to stare upon the sea, to search for crumbs, to prattle of the joys that were theirs.

They were weak, but the bo'sun put life into them.

"Stick it, sons!" he blared, ready with quip as with revolver. "Tighten up your belts another hole, an' take in your wind-pudden. This is the last day."

Some stared vacantly, and one who still had strength agreed. "Right-o ! Call it last or first—which you like. Bill an' Henry Tompson, Jack 'Ardy an' the rest, can call it both an' not lie ! I wonder," he added slowly, "wot it's like to be dead ?"

The man looked for a reply, but the bo'sun resented the question.

"If you don't know, I can't tell you," he answered.

He stared back at them from beneath shaggy brows, his beard wind-driven and divided about his throat. He stared through eyes that were bloodshot, tired, caked with salt and grime, and the men acknowledged his lordship. "You stick it," he added under his breath. "That's enough for you."

One of those who lay stiff upon the bottom-boards began to rattle, giving out the drugged cry to which they were becoming accustomed.

"Who now ?" asked the bo'sun.

"Peters."

"Anyone tending him ?"

"Yaas—is pal."

Presently the noise ceased and the bo'sun glanced round.

"Put him over," he ordered. "It's catching."

Then Peters, aided by many hands, rolled out upon the sea to join those who had gone before.

The gale droned on, nailed, as they said, to the east, brazen of tongue, with claws of steel. It reached forth as the hours passed and took toll of those who remained. The sun blared upon them at noon, adding to their torment of thirst, and two who wrangled with their last breath were put to rest together.

Then came an hour when it was no longer possible to lift their dead and push them into the sea ; when the dead lay beside the living ; when water no longer was bailed away but swished from side to side washing the faces of dead and living with fine impartiality.

There came an hour when the bo'sun could no longer balance the sweep, when it fell from his grasp and lay crookedly oscillating on its lanyard. There came an hour when he scanned the horizon for the last time, looked over his charge and said in his throat :

"Stick it, sons . . . 'nother 'ole in yer belt . . . see ?" and fell sidelong upon the thwart.

No one saw. No one heard. Only the sea and the birds, the one swished upon them all, the others craned necks, calling through the wilderness.

Wind and sea together had come into their own. The Lord whose breath had tried them was free to drowse . . . free to talk with the south wind, the west, the north . . . free to combine with all three if he listed, or to go to sleep.

And out of the flare of a dead day came a small tramp with

IBIS
NORGE.

painted white upon her sides in lettering so great the dead might read. On either hand, abaft and before the words, were painted twin flags, *couchant*. The red ensign of Norway carrying upon it the blue and white cross of a Nation at peace with Germany. They looked like four giant postage stamps ; but were intended to propitiate the Hun.

The men on the *Ibis* espied the boat and crossed to look at her. They blew a signal on their whistle, but when they found no one responded they came nearer and used their glasses. What they saw compelled them to lower a boat, to row close and make an examination.

It might have been the boat of Charon they visited, the sea the Styx ; but they took from her bottom-boards four who seemed to have " stuck it," and placed them between hot blankets in the Captain's cabin.

The rest were with the sea which had conquered them.

1916

BOOK III

THE WATCHERS

"The Germans were not prepared for a war of four years. They were enabled to carry on such a war only because our sea-power was paralysed by the Declaration of London, the most disastrous scrap of paper ever issued."

LORD SYDENHAM.

CHAPTER I

NEWS

IN the blurred and chilly dawn Dorothea awoke and looked out upon a scene not yet fully lighted by the sun.

All night it had rained, yesterday it had rained, and the lawn beneath her window, where usually the peacock walked with mincing gait, was like a lake. Far back, since the beginning of time, it seemed that rain had been falling or the mists were out. To-day the world was sodden, grey, full of exquisite half-tones ; beautiful to paint if you have the trick ; but horrible to endure now that gunfire shook the hills and the war drew nearer.

Folk said the gunfire brought rain ; but the astronomer put that away with scathing comment. Indeed, he showed a touchiness with this view that made home life difficult. He had no illusions now. Before war came he had ignored its possible advent. Now he might be seen any day after 9.30 going down the slope before his house, rifle on shoulder, brazenly defiant in the uniform of the Volunteers. Further. At the foot of his grounds he had laid out a miniature range and was accustomed after dinner to repair thither and take his turn at the targets. He was fretting, too, because Authority had announced the uselessness of Volunteers at a moment when a great soldier had gone out of his way to commend them.

Dorothea crossed her room and took up her calendar. With the blue pencil attached to one corner of it she scored out another day, the twenty-second of October, and stared at the result. Twenty-two days ! Nearly a month since Jag left, and still no word—only the guns which spoke eternally, shaking the hills. She wondered whether he had reached Port Said or was going down the Red Sea—where it never rained. It would be hot there. Jag would be dressed in white, wearing a topee . . . and the submarine menace which threatened England would no longer trouble him. Dorothea hugged that, smiling—her eyes wet.

She stood there impressed by the picture she had conjured, wondering if it were true—then kneeled to pray. It seemed more necessary to seek guidance now than in the old days. She was not aware it had become more essential. It was scarcely a subject for analysis. She had discovered simply that she could no longer visualize the scene.

Fourteen days ago she dreamed as she lay asleep that some one called her ; and on waking found it dark, the guns throbbing,

tears upon her cheek. She did not know why she wept, and her father, when she spoke of her dream, put telepathy aside, decided she was run down and must have a change. This she refused. Her charts would go out wrongly addressed, she explained. It was nothing—yet on that day she had marked her calendar with a circle as well as a cross, and prayed as those do who are at the end of resource.

And now her head ached. Why wonder? Consider the day, the hours spent yesterday in that office off the Strand; tired eyes and brain; the interminable rain, the thud of guns far behind the trenches where Buz worked with his men and pretended life was top-hole. Consider, too, the interminable silence, the dismal talk of folk who went about hinting the Navy lacked the Nelson touch and had gone to sleep. Consider, further, the wonderful cartoon which had lately appeared in *Punch*, representing a well-fed German dancing with extended hands amidst bales of cotton and crying out, "Who said, 'God punish England?' God bless England who lets us have the sinews of war!" And behind all that, emphasizing it, there lurked in Dorothea's memory the talk of her pals—Jag, Jimmy, Buz—all indefinitely vocal in the slang of the hour, pointing to fats, grease, tin, copper and a medley of goods all passing through Denmark and Sweden to succour the Fatherland.

Not a word, though, from her sailor to help her now. No hint of his ship or his whereabouts from her friends at the Admiralty; only the ghastly work of the U-boats—men starved and made mad by the sea or their wounds; men sitting in little open boats to "watch themselves die"—because, argue as you will, if they had refused to go unarmed to sea, England and her armies must have surrendered. Nothing the world has ever seen is comparable to it. Dauntless; unarmed, they gave their lives that England might live.

A letter from Effie Massenshaw which presently reached her added to her disquiet. It was just one of those scrappy notes of modern days which the war had made more scrappy, telling of Effie dreeing her weird in France and asking for news of the Haines family. On her way home that evening Dorothea called at the Rectory and sat, as she frequently did, with those still living within its walls.

A typical parson's family had come into being at this Rectory, typical of the breeding, self-reliance and effacement which has

made England what she is. It was now a warrior's home and in touch with the three Services in the ubiquitous fashion of those whose motto might have been *Ich dien*, but is not. Five children had been brought up within its walls, and of them four served and one burned because his years precluded him.

Flanders held Buz Haines, now in the trenches with the heroic Worcesters. A little phalanx of Tommies served under him, watching how he faced barbed wire, mud, the Deluge and H.E. shells. Jimmy, second-in-command of a beloved bathing machine known as H.M.S. *Chanticleer*, salt to the eyes and sleepless while at sea. Jag, captain by courtesy of Whitehall, in command of one of the Nation's food ships. Madge, a girl in her teens, sunny, picturesque in her uniform as a V.A.D., or, if it please you, one of those utilitarian persons who are content to work double tides for their country without emolument. To speak by the book, Madge was kitchen-wench at a hospital, and some day, if the war lasted long enough, might blossom as Cook, fold her hands and say *Nunc Dimittis*. And when she reached this point she would have won no cross and received no crowns—for pay was one of the perquisites reserved for folk who could hold the Nation to ransom, and often did.

Beyond this quartette, rueful amidst uniforms, roamed Dick in his seventeenth year: cogitating how he might lay hands on his birth certificate and so manipulate the date that he might join up. Winchester had not yet shown him how—but he was learning.

Just a typical parson's family in Southern England, the mother placid in spite of her cares, the Rector seeking to persuade his Bishop that his place was with the men. No frills in evidence, but carpets worn. No shrieks for more butter or more beer than fell to the lot of others. And of them it was plain that Jag was the least able to speak now he was on Service. The Navy was in constant touch with the Post Office; the soldiers east and west had special facilities for sending and receiving letters; but a merchant ship having sailed was as definitely cut off as if the sea had swallowed her.

Jimmy could write:—

“Dear Mum,” that was his phrase, “just got in. Wet to the eyes. Everything smashed that isn't steel. As much water in my cabin as overside. No—not Fritz. There are none. Weather!!!

"Going to dine with the S.N.O. to-night, so must get a bath. Hope it means that half-stripe!!! O.K. if it does—what? Having a top-hole time, anyhow. Cheerio!

Ever your affect.

JIMMY."

And from Buz, but in a different vein :—

"DEAR MOTHER,

"You must forgive this scrawl, but you see I am rather cramped for room and neither pen or ink are quite what they were in my digs. There's a man snoring—anaesthetics—at my side, so close that I could touch him. Against my elbow is the wall of my dug-out. It trickles slime and the straw we are on is pulped in mud. But the thing that makes writing difficult is shell fire—sometimes it's one of Willie's worst werfers as that chap called 'em. They fall with a plop like a rat in a pool, then spit, and it's beastly.

"Last night one of our lot crept out to retrieve a poor devil who was lying on the wire. It was dark—had to wait for that—and the bullets were flying in bursts with the rattle of a reaper in full blast. It was too—I mean the reaper, as you will guess. Of course one lies doggo when that's on, and the floor's mud and the air's mud in chunks, and sometimes a piece gets you fair in the eye. Rotten for a man's kit, but we scrape down when we get back. Anyhow, after a devil of a fight with the wire and mud and flops, our man got hold of his quarry and managed to retrieve him.

"If it hadn't been raining and as thick as a London particular he wouldn't have scored. But he did, and I expect it means an M.C.

"Lucky beggar—the retriever, I mean. The other, I'm afraid, is bound west——"

But from Jag Haines there came not a line.

Mrs Haines was sitting in her accustomed chair by the fire, reading for the fifth time these letters when Dorothea entered. She re-read them after wiping her eyes, then looked up and said :

"Poor dear Buz !"

"Splendid Buz !" Dorothea corrected.

"Yes—of course ; but still . . . I wonder who the retriever is ?"

"Buz," said Dorothea with conviction.

"Thank you !" The Rector smiled. "I have argued that

for an hour." He looked intensely proud. "No—we will spare you the repetition, my dear, and wait for confirmation, if you please." He turned to Dorothea. "Well, how goes the work?" He still held her hand, looking up as she stood by his side, searching her eyes.

"Busy," she answered at once. "Rather a rush to-day . . . I shall have to run home almost at once."

"Cycling?"

"Yes. Any news for me, I wonder?"

"Not a word."

She remained but a short time, then rose and said good night. The Rector accompanied her to the door and she faced him, white to the lips.

"I can't get used to this silence," she said. "Everyone has letters except those who are connected with the Merchant Service. Do you think it fair?"

"I try rather ineffectually to bear it," he replied.

"Exactly. You are as anxious as I am!"

"One cannot have sons in the three Services and forget their risks, my dear."

"Naturally—still, you hear from Jimmy and Buz, but not from Jag. It's hateful!"

"Steady, Doretta. Don't give up your faith," he urged.

She put her hand in his, looking up, falteringly, pitifully. "No—I won't do that. Or if I do, I'll come and tell you."

The grip of his hand calmed her and she met his eyes without flinching.

A grey Admiralty car with R.N. in black on its side stood before the door when Dorothea reached home. She dismounted at once swift to see who called. It was Sir Douglas Clancy's car, the car which had brought him that night when Schultz had tried his hand at love and chicane. Somehow it inspired her. She smiled response to the chauffeur's salute, wheeled her cycle into the porch and entered.

An Admiral's great coat lay on the oak settle, and from the library door came the boom of his voice. Dorothea entered. He did not see her. He was looking at her father who stood straddled upon the hearth in the uniform of the Volunteers, while Mrs Nesbit sat near.

"... The Navy knows," he was saying, "that you can't send ships to fight forts without losing your ships. Nelson was under

no sort of doubt about the result of that. And we know that the essence of such an attempt is secrecy. No stupidities. . . . No fools. But what happened? First the ships were sent in and told to do it off their own bat. Then, after a prodigious pause, the soldiers, with an 'up and at 'em!' for inspiration.

"Ghastly! The Fleet was to do it without the soldiers. Then the soldiers were to do it while the Fleet held the ring. And presently the only question worth considering will be how in the world are we to get the men and the ships away without sacrifice. . . ." He turned about ruffling his cropped hair, and saw Dorothea standing flushed from her ride just at the edge of the group. "God bless my soul!" He advanced swiftly with the phrase, hands extended, and kissed her forehead. "Nesbit! Why didn't you tell me? Cassandra with her god-like grace and gift of prophecy standing to take lessons of an old man past belief in anything. Why didn't you speak? Come with me to Downing Street and I will engage some of them listen—no, not to me, to you. You plead for sailors, don't you, child? You would not see them set impossible tasks, would you?"

Dorothea with set lips said, "No. I think it is murder."

"I knew it . . . but to hearten the Mugwumps, all the tribe who squeak out, 'What is the Navy doing?' and forgot to keep the Navy at full strength when the Estimates were before them."

"No—not even to hearten them," she smiled.

"I kiss your hand!" He bowed over it with the old-world grace, released her and went off at a tangent. "I resigned because of this. I couldn't have faced my men when they came back—if any do come back. I ventured to criticize Authority"—the word rolled on his tongue as though he tasted it—"and that made it difficult. It was an indiscretion! If others had ventured on similar indiscretions in the past we shouldn't be quaking now before the U-boats of Germany. That for your pipe, Nesbit. Good God! Am I to kowtow before a crowd of amateurs who know no more of ships, Flora, than your Spitz knows of Trincomalee? But it is not the Navy alone. Miracles of strategy are everywhere. The soldiers are concentrating for decisive results on the Western Front. Meanwhile the First Lord has initiated an expedition to force the Dardanelles and seize Constantinople; India is busy with a nice little campaign in Mesopotamia; while the Chancellor of the Exchequer is trying his damndest to withdraw all our men and material from France and pitch 'em into the Balkans. . . . How could I remain?"

"You could not," Nesbit threw into the pause, "and you will have the Nation behind you if there's trouble."

"Thanks, but I doubt it. I know the Dardanelles, too. I learned it in 'seventy-eight, a grim year, under the illustrious Hornby. We had luck then . . . but now . . ."

"Don't stop there," Dorothea ventured in the pause that ensued, and instantly he turned smiling, shaking his head.

"Alas! that is the trouble. You are a child—a girl child—and this is a State secret—which means that it is so confidential and inflammable that all the Clubs are discussing it. To-morrow or a month hence some big-wig will get up and make a statement. The papers will then discuss it, call it a *ballon d'essai* and rend it. Wait till the cat is adrift, little girl I love and refuse in one breath." He crossed over and laid one hand on her shoulder. "If I told everyone who asks me what we are going to do, I should be busy from now to the Kalends. I am worried. You can't allay it, any of you. It is the price of resignation. One pays and hopes that those who carry on will not make the position worse for our men. If I had my way . . ." He halted, smiling, one finger raised to give the lie to that. "Well—I can have it. I am free to-day and can cross to America or Denmark or Sweden and try to find out what is at the back of it . . . risk the end and learn nothing—for Exports are the key of the situation, *ours* as well as the Neutrals. The Navy could throttle Germany and end the war in three months . . . but the Navy may not use its power. Why? You are mine own people—but I may not speak. . . . God! I feel as poor Craddock felt when he buried his Orders before sailing to meet his fate. . . ."

"Flora, Dodo my child, Nesbit, this is the day of the Humanitarians who argue that war is wrong. Well—no one loves it *per se*, but we love the long-purse less. Once war was chivalrous; now it is won by the long-purse. . . . At the battle of Fontenoy," he tossed at them, "the English and French Guards in advancing suddenly came face to face; but neither side would begin the fight. They faced each other critical perhaps of those points a soldier appreciates. Then a French officer left the ranks and, waving a white handkerchief, came to where the English Commander stood at the head of his men. He doffed his hat, bowing with the grace of the age, and asked, 'Will it please the gentlemen of the English Guards to fire first?'"

"That was in the age of chivalry; but to-day there is a force in the background which says, 'We will not permit you to starve

Germany'; but Germany, mark you, may starve us—and will if we give her time to build U-boats. . . .

"So—the Humanitarians having tied us in knots stand aside and the Epicureans come in. 'Live and let live,' they say. 'To-day there is plenty and we have flooded the land with gold—eat while you may.' The Sanitarians come in—'If you slaughter as you propose,' they cry, 'the world will die of epidemic. We have no desire to starve the civil populations,' and they laugh at the danger of the U-boat. . . . Then the Laodiceans take a hand. Lukewarm in Faith, lukewarm in war. 'Why not try our patent gooseberry squirts?' they ask. 'Are they not death on wasps?' . . . Finally, the money-lenders come in and clinch it 'If you, smash too hard and grind too fine,' they complain, 'you will kill trade. We cannot afford to kill an Export Nation, or we shall starve when the war is won. . . .' Subtle! Any argument to tie our hands. And I? Well, I am a dreamer, a person with a bee . . ."

His words belied him. There was no suggestion of weakness, nothing of the dreamer in his attitude. The phrases poured out hot and scathing. True, he was among his own people, yet his eyes blazed. He became implacable, sinister, one to avoid if, as he phrased it, you had played the fool; but at no moment did he lose touch of his argument, falter for words or permit himself the luxury of passion. There was a sense of restraint about the man's attitude, his fighting jaw and face that even the blaze of his words could not veil.

"You will gather we are doing badly," he tossed over his shoulder. "You are right. We are. Divided councils; divided objectives; too many Committees—but there are compensations. Luckily for us the All-Highest War Lord directs operations on sea as well as on land, and he wants to keep his fleet for some museum at Potsdam. If Tirpitz had had a free hand when we were dodging Pompey behind the Islands, and were without mines or booms or guns to defend our Bases, he could have so reduced us, without ever risking a fleet action, that the High Seas Fleet might have had a chance against the Grand Fleet. Now he is too late. We hold him. But picture what might have happened if the German sailors had had sea-sense . . ."

He leaned forward speaking more quietly than since his entrance. For the first time he seemed oppressed. For the first time there came a hint of dubiety:

"I wish I could be sure what is at the back of it all . . . there

is some one, something . . . God knows who or what, and we are tied in consequence."

"The Neutrals?" Nesbit suggested because it seemed he waited.

He shook that off smiling. "I wish it were no more complex. It is deeper than that—something shadowy in the background of events. Some Force akin to that which follows in the track of an earthquake—miasma, world-sickness. . . Neutrals? My dear man, if we trade as the Neutral trades, how can we expect him to cease trading? Isn't it plain? 'What about your own escutcheon, John Bull?' is, in effect, the answer of Brother Jonathan. No—it won't suffice. It's deeper than that. Something far back—like a curse in Old Testament times, or the procession of events which followed in the footsteps of the Wandering Jew . . ."

He drew himself up, noting for the first time the effect of his words on those to whom these ideas were new. With his old courtesy he set himself to disabuse those present. Dorothea smiling, instantly reacting: "You understand, of course, that although I have put the case as one which is nearly hopeless, we do not consider it hopeless . . . but it will cost more in blood and money, you may rely on that. As a matter of fact, it is a problem, dear child, and as you know who send out charts, that is merely an incentive to probe deeper. We may have to call in the ladies. Intuition is theirs *par excellence*. Perhaps some day, when this war has fought itself to a standstill, some one may speak, or a woman with intuition will make her reading . . ."

They were debating this and in a new mood when Williams entered to announce dinner. Nesbit turned to the Admiral: "You can stay and take pot-luck with us, I hope?"

"That is what I came for," he smiled back. "I was fuggy. The run and the talk has cleared my brain."

They entered the dining-room and took their places. As they sat, Sir Douglas looked across at Dorothea and said, "When we have won it will be a pleasure to recall these meetings. In the meantime it is our duty to keep fit."

"In that case," Dorothea answered, "it will be necessary to provide better food."

"Ah! that's where your Merchant Service comes in."

"Mine?"

"So I gathered."

"I am afraid it does not come in," Nesbit joked, to ease the

girl, "or if it does, it brings what we in our schooldays called musty tucker."

The Admiral chuckled aloud, "America, Canada and the B.A. getting rid of their surplus stores. 'We eat what we can,' you remember, 'and what we can't we can.'"

"Tainted stores," Mrs Nesbit laughed.

"Bacon cured with boracic . . . a get-rich-quick tip," Sir Douglas tossed back.

"Butter bad and at a premium," Nesbit shrugged.

"Margarine as a substitute, but mixed with rancid oil," Dorothea ventured to make it plain.

"Horrible!" the Admiral admitted. "The price we pay for our unreadiness and our neglect of the Farmer."

"It's no use ramming that home," the astronomer proclaimed. "As a fact I am doing what I couldn't have done in the old days, Fresh air and drill have made a new man of me in spite of the tucker. I feel fit for the trenches and am half ashamed not to be in them . . ."

Sir Douglas glanced quizzically at his cousin, who was enjoying a wing and part of the breast and looked particularly well nourished. He said more seriously, "See he doesn't join up, Flora, for we may yet find a use for astronomers." He turned to his host. "I mean it, Nesbit. The training is harmless provided you don't attempt too much; but the trenches would finish you."

"I was fifty-five last March," Nesbit announced, "and never felt fitter in my life. If you had told me twelve months ago I should be digging trenches and laying out barbed-wire entanglements to trip up the Huns, I should have laughed at you."

"In all probability," the Admiral chuckled, "you would have called in your doctor to see if I were sane."

"Perhaps. Meanwhile, as you still are our welcome guest, and I have begun to take some interest in the Merchant Service, will you give me your view of what led to the *Lusitania* disaster?"

The Admiral glanced round, saw Williams grave and imperturbable by the sideboard, and said, "Would you mind telling me why that interests you?"

"Readily. I wish to be in a position either to admit or refute a statement I heard the other day. The town babbles over it."

Sir Douglas sipped his claret. "Always these stupidities get repeated, and roll, accumulating lies. Tell me. I will answer if I may."

"I was told," Nesbit complained, "that the *Lusitania* was deliberately sacrificed in order to stir opinion in America."

"What? To bring her off the fence?"

"That was the inference."

"Go on. Tell me how he substantiated it."

"He said that in a naval action a vessel is sometimes given to the wolves so that her consorts may escape. He said the Navy would not hesitate in the case of a fighting ship, and if that were so, why should it do so when such a splendid opportunity occurred of bringing America into the war as our Ally?"

"Devilish!" the Admiral growled out. "Plausible, too. That is the curse of it. Good God! How far has this gone? Club, I suppose? Some quidnunc airing his views to explain how closely he is in touch with Authority. Who?"

"No—I am not justified in stating that."

"True. With the libel laws as they are you are not. I would like his name. . . . I would scarify him."

"I was hoping you would enable me to quash it," Nesbit explained. "It seemed essential."

"I agree. It is. These things are worries. Refuting them is difficult. They are lies, as a rule; hatched in the brain of some propagandist often without doubt. Nothing seems too silly for these folk. They spew them out on the chance of making trouble . . . They are not fit for this world—and sometimes, in war-time, it becomes necessary to promote them to another . . ."

He sat back angry, drumming with his fingers on the table, his eyes clouded. "I am not squeamish," he said again. "If it is necessary to use frightfulness I would use it without a shudder. But this man ought to be set against a brick wall . . . 'Trailing the skirt,' we call it that, with *Lusitania*! With a ship cram-full of women and babies—for the sake of entangling America. . . . Good God! Your man is a liar and a fool. Tell him I said so. If it requires that to bring in America, America can go hang! Tell him if he cares to repeat it you will give me his name and he shall figure before a file of marines, his back to the wall. Tell him, or others if you will, that if her Captain"—he spoke very slowly here—"had obeyed Admiralty instructions, *Lusitania* might have been afloat to-day."

"Then you blame the Captain?"

"No—for I do not know why he disobeyed."

"But why should he disobey?"

"That I cannot tell you. You may take it though that a Merchant Service man is at a disadvantage in war."

Dorothea turned instantly, her eyes gleaming. "How?" she breathed. "Please tell me. I am certain it is true."

"True, child? Aye, like enough it is true. But I can say very little. You remember the loss of the *Titanic*? Well, was that inevitable?"

She shook her head. "I know it was not."

"Neither was *Lusitania*."

"Ah!" Again she monopolized him, entranced. "I am so thankful to hear you say so. It is exactly what Jag told me before he sailed."

"Jag?"

"Captain Haines, of the *Vulcan*, you remember."

"Quite. I didn't recognize Jag—and so he is in the *Vulcan*—the Eastern Mail Service?" He seemed to muse.

"Yes."

"Who rammed a U-boat off Cape Bon and told the world he had done it!" He chuckled. "Yes, yes. I know him. They made him resign because he rammed, though they called it something else. I would like to have my way with that kind of shipowner. They are the men who are making enormous profits out of the war and squealing at the suggestion of Government control. No—I would not control them. I would commandeer—lock, stock and barrel, just to show them the Nation means business. . . .

"We commandeer houses, hotels and so forth if we require them, and we pay no rent. We commandeer horses, take over whole stables, and if anyone kicks send along a company to bring the beasts to H.Q.; but shipowners are sacrosanct. I am a little tired of differential treatment and of 'orders to Commanders' which may make a man doubt whom he should obey. The sailors are tired of it, too—especially that section which has the felicity of fighting without guns."

"Splendid!" Dorothea cried. Then, with eyes suffused over flushed cheeks, "You are helping me tremendously and I'm very, very grateful."

He faced her with that quizzical attitude which was at once his strength and his weakness. "The English Nation lives by its sailors," he said, "and yet is only moderately concerned about their welfare. That, as perhaps you understand, is because sailors are voteless. You will have to alter this when the war is done

with—show them how ‘to keep on pestering.’” He smiled in her face. “You take a great interest in the Merchant Service, but what have we done to lose place?”

“You have not . . . but the Navy has guns and Jag has none,” she answered.

“True—and I pity him from my soul. I am prepared to extend that sentiment to every captain, officer and man in the Merchant Service, yet we can do nothing for them.”

“Why not?”

“To begin with, there are neither guns nor gunners . . .”

“And to end with?” she persisted. “Is it the Neutrals who prevent us getting ready the guns . . . will they really fight us if we insist on arming our ships?”

The Admiral leaned towards her without speech. He made the sign of the Cross on his lips, his eyes keen to recognize her distress. He moved his head slightly from side to side, watching her intently, then slowly said, “Just now, lady of the splendid years, I called you Cassandra . . . are you going to justify the slur?”

She faced him in an agony, her eyes brimming. “Tell me, tell me!” she begged, and suddenly rose from her place to leave the room.

Sir Douglas rose also and accompanied her to the door.

“It would kill you if anything happened to Jag Haines?” he said quietly, while those she had escaped looked on.

“I love him,” she whispered through trembling lips.

“And he is captain of the *Vulcan*.” The comment seemed unnecessary, yet she nodded, shrinking as from a blow.

The Admiral’s face was a study in passivity. He seemed inclined to frown; then came words which stung even as they caressed:

“‘Honey is not for the mouth of an Ass, nor knowledge for the mind of a woman.’ It is written, nevertheless, that love conquers.” And again, in softer mood, “If presently it happens that you need help, call on me. . . . You have your passport ready?”

“Yes.”

He opened the door and she went out, her brain tingling with that question he had asked on parting.

CHAPTER II

HERR DOKTOR

IT was dark when Haines came to himself. In his ears was a drone, deeper, more steadfast than the wind. The hum of a dynamo, perhaps, heard from afar but held in some cavernous space that thrilled to the sound ; caught it up, tossed it back, perpetually keeping it alive.

Haines pushed out his hands, fumbling, not yet fully conscious. His temples throbbed. He touched them and found them wet. That puzzled him. After long thought he felt unable to assign a cause.

He discovered presently that he was wet all over. His clothes were wet, his hair trickled, and to his eyes there came water which partially blinded him. He attempted to look around, but the darkness lay like a veil between him and the sound . . . that curious, long-drawn hum that vibrated all through the world ; came back, bounded away and never for an instant ceased. He strove to think, to connect these two facts, and acknowledged he could not think.

After a time it seemed that he must be in his cabin with the door shut. In that case he must find the door handle, admit light or switch on the lamp. Again he held breath, searching with fingers which everywhere came in contact with iron that was rough and disagreeable to the touch. It girt him about like the sides of a tunnel. He raised himself cautiously, feeling on all sides. The blackness remained, the noise remained—whirring like a top before it goes to sleep. After long thought he decided he was not in his room, nor in any part of the ship he controlled ; but that he was in a tunnel of some sort, and memory took him swiftly to the days when, as a boy, he had been lowered into a water-tank and ordered to dry it out. Again, as he sat still, listening, wondering, the picture of a wounded man rose before him ; one with a handkerchief twisted round his neck over the edge of which blood oozed. He called out, "Who is that ?" and, after a moment, "Is that the donkeyman ?" But no answer came to him ; it was all flat, soundless—like a tomb.

A desire presently to sleep, to laugh or weep came to him. Then, after hours, minutes, days—he could not say which—all these emotions passed as the memory of the dead pass, and left him crouched, listening, still fighting a drowsiness which had

assailed him and bade him sleep, seeing he was buried alive and must starve.

Noise disturbed him, and with eyes blinking at light he became aware of a manhole in the side of his tomb. It vanished as he sat up. He thought he heard voices and again called, found the dead wall of his prison and drummed upon it, crying for aid. None came. Instead he was troubled by a squeal, small, thin, almost a squeak. He sat very still to listen, drawing in his limbs, his flesh alive to terror.

He searched the dark now, his brain busy with phantasmagoria, and saw the eyes of a small creature, far off, like points of flame, which danced up his knees, squealed, fell, reappeared beside him.

He lunged at it and in some way it touched his face, sprang and again climbed his knees, while horror chained him. The points of flame remained still also. A second pair joined with the first and he stretched out one hand very slowly, rising and leaning forward as he did so, and suddenly pounced. The point of light vanished, a tiny scuffle and squeak held him breathless ; then he struck out blindly and fell back bruised, but with no knowledge that he was bruised.

Again light appeared. Haines did not know how long he had clung in silence ; but it came as before from the side of his grave, and with it a guffaw—loud, immensely pleased.

"I told you so." Haines became aware of a Teutonic guttural and discovered two faces framed in the man-hole opening. "Zese fellows 'aven't the pluck of a lowse," followed, pinning the speaker.

A harsher voice challenged this. "Most peoble," it said, "would be sgared in zat 'ole." An electric torch shone through the aperture, and two white mice ran squealing to the cage held open for them. "Frightened by zwei mowse," the first voice commented. "Wot about zat bet ? Durn over !" came the order, suddenly stern. "Come out quick . . . or I 'elp you more than you lige."

Haines got grip of his faculties at the first whisper. The presence of those two peering in at him caused no surprise. He seemed to have expected something of the sort, and with the exit of "zwei mowse" a flick of amusement touched him. "Lord ! how I squirmed," was his thought. That tickled him. But he had no leisure now. The voice belonged to the epoch which was ending in red savagery at sea—murder, poison, pillage and outrage

on land. It came from the throat of one known to sailors as a Squarehead : a thick-necked, pale, braggadocio individual who went about the world obeying All-Highest and taking his fill of slaughter.

Haines as yet had no clear mental image of his captors ; but he knew that a Squarehead alone could produce those gutturals and be guilty of a trick so vile. Savages, it is true, are accustomed to torture a prisoner and then take him, raw and quivering, to the stake . . . but this person could speak English . . .

"Come out of it quick or I shoot you off-and !" came to remind Haines that there was nothing else he could do. As his feet touched the deck outside he was seized and handcuffed. The two confronting him were officers in the uniform of the German sea service. They spoke swiftly together ; then the commander turned to Haines with "Sprechen sie Deutsch ?" for a test.

"I know a few words and sentences, nothing more."

"It is a misfortune."

Haines made no comment.

"If you had known us better zis would not 'av 'appen." He turned to the guard and ordered them to bring him along, as though the two, between them, were responsible for the war.

They passed down an alley-way beyond which came the drone of machinery that had so troubled Haines as he lay in his tomb, and now proved to him that beyond doubt he was in a submarine—probably the one which had torpedoed the *Vulcan*.

His pulses thrilled as the notion stirred. He had never been in a submarine ; but once, long ago, he had gone in a diving suit to the bottom of Hong Kong bay, and something of the sensation he experienced then touched him now. But for the humming and the presence of his captors he could have supposed he dreamed, so still were the passages he traversed.

They came to a steel ladder and climbed to a deck more brilliantly lighted—everything painted grey, doors and berths opening off the passage of the same dead hue. Only the bunk sides were of wood, and the rack above each was similar to that in use in liners. Haines was at liberty to use his eyes as they passed, and until they reached the Commander's quarters nothing was said. At the entrance they halted. The two officers went in and took seats before a small table ; Haines followed and the guard closed the door.

It was a tiny room, and Haines stood in it very much as in the Navy defaulters stand before their Captain to answer for their

sins. He shivered, but not from fear. He was wet to the skin, sick and dizzy, while the moist atmosphere of the room in which they were shut and the smell of oil completed his sense of fatigue. He stood swaying, the guard's hand steadying him. The Commander produced a sword and laid it across the table. He seemed uneasy. His eyes constantly shifted from one object to another. His lips and head had a trick of twitching which mated oddly with the braggadocio of a moment since.

His companion saw this, but made no comment. He took up a pen, opened a log book and proceeded to chew peppermint. This added to the odours.

"What is your name?" questioned the Commander.

"Haines."

"Wot?"

"William Atherton Haines."

The assistant who chewed wrote it, spelling laboriously the last two. The surname under this process became Aines.

"Haines," the Captain announced.

"Haines," repeated the assistant, adding the letter.

"Wot is your ship's name?" came next from the head of the table.

"*Vulcan.*"

"Size, in gross tons?"

"Seven thousand five hundred."

"Port?"

"Glasgow."

The scribe followed in monotone, his jaw working. "Se-ven tousan' vive 'undred dons . . . Glasgow," he repeated.

Haines stared at the man's head as he bent over the table. It was of the usual German type, thick to the neck and thatched with short, bristly hair which showed a bluish scalp lying in folds across the back of it. He did not look clean. The hand with which he wrote appeared to suggest the business of stoking; but it did not jerk as did that of his Commander.

The Commander followed Haines' glance and seemed annoyed.

"Owners?" he snapped. "Who did she belong to?"

"The Eastern Mail Service."

"So?" He looked up, suspicious.

Haines made no comment.

"The same Company that own the *Deccan*, *Australia* and *Hankow*?"

"Yes."

"But that is a mail service?"

"I agree."

"Of which Lord Bruzzelton," he pronounced it so, "is the Chairman, hein?"

"Yes."

"You chooze to be laconic."

"I want to get it over," said Haines.

"To get it over, hey?" The Commander leaned forward, rapping with the hilt of his sword on the table. "You are here," he growled, his eyes narrowing, "to keep a siffel tongue in your head . . . not to be impertinent."

"I am not aware," Haines replied, in spite of the stress, "of any attempt at impertinence. I am Captain in the British Merchant Service, you are in command of a German submarine. If you are going to shoot me, shoot quickly; if you are not, give me something to eat. A man can't choose his words when he is hungry."

The scribe failed to register this. He sat back drumming with his pen. "Is this official?" he asked in German.

"No," came back with a snarl so open that Haines drew breath slowly.

He expected to be ordered out at once, and stared as the Commander suddenly rose to his feet and with a torrent of gutturals left the cabin with a slammed door. The smell of oil and peppermints mixed and simmering in a steaming atmosphere rushed in waves across the room, fluttering the leaves of a tell-tale log which Haines would have given his soul to read; but it brushed his sense of smell also and he retched.

The chewer glanced up at him and read something of his stress. "Zea-zick?" he questioned, a twinkle lurking.

"Sea-sick be damned! Man sick, air sick . . . sick for want of food and drink."

"So? Take ziss," he opened a flask, and the guard, with rifle and fixed bayonet at the ready, released Haines' arm. The chewer, perhaps, saw doubt in the prisoner's glance, for he said, "It is all right. It weel not hurt . . . it is brandy—see?" He poured out a small tot, swallowed it and again extended the flask.

Haines took it, his face flushing. "I was not thinking of that," he said. "I was wondering how it will act, seeing I haven't had anything to eat since——"

"Since we torpedo you," the chewer decided.

Haines drank without further comment. His companion's jaw

resumed work and a new odour stole through the narrow space—brandy, peppermint, oil.

“Zat is two days ago. Lissen wot I say and say nossing back . . . keep very quiet or zat dam fool orderly give away the show—understand? He spick only his own tongue—understand? It eis important not to show sign that you are astonished. . . . Lissen! Our skipper is madt—more or less. Presently he will be more madt. I am Doctor and know. I am also clerk and wot you call clergyman . . . say somesings. Ask for bread, somesings to eat.”

Haines kept very still under this. Perhaps the brandy steadied him, perhaps the knowledge that he must obey in any case helped him more. With the face of an automaton he gathered what was desired by this chewing bearer of a triune authority and said calmly:

“I am hungry. Give me something to eat.”

“More zad zan that,” the puckered lips prompted. “Get faint . . . fall down—onderstand?”

Haines assimilated this. He extended manacled hands; but the orderly drew back his rifle and stood ready to lunge till a curt order from his officer brought him again to attention.

Haines continued to simulate pain, giddiness, anything he could think of, and suddenly with a desperate stagger collapsed in a very decent heap. He grumbled out words as he fell and felt supremely stupid; but the officer, in his capacity as doctor, came quickly to his aid. He stooped over him, took hold of his wrist and opened the case of his watch. The rolls of flesh across the back of his head and neck intensified their creased convolutions.

“Donnerwetter!” he grumbled, gravely kneeling, his eyes on the guard. “The prisoner for the lack of food faints,” he spoke in German here. “In the absence of Herr Kommandant I prescribe the necessary restoratives. Call at once the steward.”

Instantly, on the exit of the sailor, he leaned nearer and, as he busied himself unfastening Haines’ collar, issued instructions, comment and advice in strange sequence. “When he come back, keep eyes shut. Make eyelids shake if it eis possible. You act as well as I spick English. Damn bad bose of them . . . not worth tup-pence a night on ze stage.”

He opened a drawer and produced biscuits and cake-chocolate. “Eat,” he ordered. “Mind—I do zis because I want ’elp. I know of you nussing; but I know of England a great deal. I was at Bart’s w’en war come, an’ I get away quickly because I

know England will join up, as you say, even because she can do nussing elze . . . onderstand ? An' now it is ezential I get 'elp. Keep eyes shut, moan if it possible w'en he come back, make arms, legs, everysing more looze . . . ezential because wizout 'elp it become impossible w'en our Commander go madt to get back or get anyw'ere . . . onderstand ? ” He pressed this with extreme gravity—“ Anyw'ere—you zee that ? ”

Haines admitted that so far words had not been wasted, and ay still eating as he was bidden.

“ I do not do anysing to 'elp you because I wish you well, or wish to 'urt my Commander ; but to zave my own skin an' ze boat—onderstand ? I was at Bart's . . . I learn somesing of English peobles. I learn to sink well of them—onderstand ? ”

“ Quite,” Haines articulated.

“ You can navigate ? ” came with abrupt emphasis upon this.

“ Yes—certainly.”

“ W'en Von Nekker gets madt zere will be no one left who can navigate—only you, onderstand ? ”

“ Who is Von Nekker ? ”

“ The Commander of U 59, ze boat we are in. Hist ! Spick in more small voice w'en man come back. Faint peobles no can articulate as we who are well. I want especially your bromise to 'elp, because . . . just now you see 'ow he run away—Nekker, I mean—because 'is nerf is gone. Zat is wot cause him presently to become madt. No nerf. . . . All gone away in U-boat service ; an' now, if we running underwater as now, hein ? an' 'ee feel that she have arrive. . . . Christo ! 'Ow I explain zis ? in wot zey call in aeroplane, wind-pocket, a place w'ere density is less zan in ozzer places, an' she begin to fall . . . fall, perhaps to turn over, 'ee can no longer sit still. He run away to ze control, jump on officer of watch an' take charge 'imself. . . . He is in control now. Perhaps he 'as by this time gone madt. It will come zudden, an' w'en it come I shall want 'elp—onderstand ? ” He bent over, emphasizing this. “ I shall ber'aps be the only officer left on board who knows ze controls, ze only one, for of course ze engineers . . . ” He clucked disdain and ended suddenly, “ Will you 'elp ? I tell you everysing. Go on, eat. Zat steward damn long in 'is wind ! ”

Haines considered this, although he had already decided what he would do, and said :

“ Suppose I refuse ? ”

“ I leave you to Von Nekker. He soon finish everysing.”

"Very well, you can rely on me ; but I must have something solid to eat, and these things must come off."

"You giff your parole if I take zem off ?"

"To what ?"

The man of triune authority rolled suddenly on his haunches, his fist lifted. "Gurt ! *Mein Gott !* Gurt as zat Kitchener 'oo make your armies an' bring us to a round-durn . . . *Gott !* I like your peobles. You ought to be wiz us, not against us. All ziss wot we call Schrecklichkeit is the result of your joining wiz our too many enemies. I argue nussing. You may belief or not belief ; ze end remains. You tingle, but you not show it ; you feel danger, but you make no words of it . . . you are Phlegmatisch ; we are nerfous. . . . *Ach !* we haff change places an' moust pay the consequences. Parole ? *Ja !* I want zat to zese sings," he enumerated the points, ticking them on his fingers. "You will not dry to escape ; you will not dry to give us to your peobles ; you will not dry to destroy any bart of ze boat . . ."

Haines halted the flow of words with—"I can't give my word to that."

"Zen I 'ave waste time. I giff up all I said. I leave you to Von Nekker."

A cold shiver ran down Haines' back, but the words came without hesitation.

"You ask me to be a traitor to my country. . . . Sorry—I'm not taking any."

"Daking wot ?"

"Risks of that kind."

"Goodt—zen I must. I argue nussing. I release you—so. An' I trust."

He unlocked the handcuffs and flung them aside. "Get up if you are able . . . sit in zat chair—so, it is better than the deck. Zat steward is more trouble zan I sought. Goodt ! I trust you. Zat is enough. I trust you, because I moust—onderstand ? Zere is that between us, an' you will not give me away ?"

"No."

A crash sounded close at hand and Haines looked round, startled in spite of himself. The thing did not end there. Flashes of sound, groans and the crack as of water on hot iron kept him on edge. They recurred even more violently. The detonations ran by degrees one into the other until it seemed they were under fire ; but the German made no comment. He watched Haines from under heavy brows. The groaning decreased, became less

violent and finally ended in a series of concussions that caused the thin plates to vibrate and hum with sound. Haines accepted these things with the fatalistic admission of all sailors. It was new to him, strange ; but, he argued, his eyes on his companion, if it were anything out of the common, the German would scarcely be occupied in striving to read the effect it produced on his prisoner. He smiled as the juxtaposition of their thought struck him ; there came a vision of Dorothea at work somewhere in this maelstrom, doing what the slang of the day termed " her bit " for the common cause and ignorant, thank God ! of her lover's peril. That thrilled him. For a moment it came near to unman him ; then the guttural accents of this U-boat personage broke the thread.

" I tink," he said, with deliberation, " zat you haff been before in submarine—no ? "

" Wrong there, Herr Doctor. This is my first trip."

" Zen you see Hell, wiz the lid on, as you say," came back as comment, grimly suggestive in tone and effect.

" War is hell in any case," Haines admitted.

" But zis is unter-sea war . . . ze worse kind. The kind that kills men while they continue to live, to eat, to talk, to come to zair wifes an' breed children who will be imbecile from zair birth. Wiz-out rest, constant an' long, it is not possible here to retain balance ; an' you, wiz your Gran' Fleet, haff taken a strangle-grip of our throat which prevents ze rest zat is so necessaire to us. *Ach !* Is zat not Hell wiz ze lid on ? Wot Hell is greater for evil zan the Hell which affects the unborn, ze life-blood of a Nation ? . . . ze one sing which may renew our strength w'en all zis frischfröhliche krieg is done an' forgotten."

He moved up and down the small cabin growling out his complaint, listening sometimes as he turned, plainly on edge, but strong in his condemnation of the conditions he endured. " You 'urt us with your strangle-grip," he said in effect ; but the hurts which had produced that strangle-grip were left aside. He was concerned with Germany, the welfare of her people, critical of his leaders and oblivious of the sins of his countrymen.

A steward arrived with a suit of clothes and undergarments. He turned on him with brusque catechism, demanding to know why so much delay had occurred. The answer was not plain. The doctor became more brusque, the steward more deferential ; then on his departure the doctor growled out :

"Nekker have all 'ands at stations. We are wizout two officers an' stewards moust take zair plaze." Meanwhile he advised a change of clothes and more chocolate. "Zay are my own. We of one height are near an' zay moust do. I haff yours dry—yes ; not easy in U-boat, zat. Everysing wet all ze time. When not wet, steam, smell—as you no doubt haff observe."

The vessel lurched as he spoke, and the wash of seas was plainly audible amidst the thud of machinery.

The doctor stood still, his head twisted to catch impressions. Haines was occupied in changing clothes, rubbing down and making an eighteen-inch collar lap without rucking.

Again the vessel lurched and a sea went swishing past, while every stringer and plate screamed of the strain. The doctor moved up the slanting deck, and came back suddenly with a thump on the lee panels.

"He gone up for air," he growled, "but he haff to go down again. Zere is a gale. You cannot get air in *unterzee* boat w'en wind make difficulties."

A gong clanged.

Somewhere in the fish-like hull that carried them, quivering with strange movement, Haines recognized that orders were being transmitted, and that a crew would obey the voice of Von Nekker whose "nerf was gone."

The doctor regarded the fact from the standpoint of knowledge ; Haines from that of surmise. The doctor waited in silence for an evolution to which he was no stranger, and his comment came in jerked-out sentences which tallied strangely with his phlegmatic appearance.

"As I t'ought," he announced, and again began to move. "We go down. We cannot stay up w'en too mouch wind come."

Von Nekker, he decided, was in the turret, and presently he would dive. Diving was unpleasant in a big vessel. Things happened unless a "man has good nerf. Some boat require mouch attention because zey are easily tilted an' may go too deep bevore gontrol is regain." And the fates had decided that too much sea would compel them to go down—"w'ere Nekker would find ze quiet too mouch for his nerf."

A singing and bubbling noise broke upon his speech, and for a moment he stood.

"Goin' down," he announced over his shoulder. "Onze in ze North Sea we went down quick, quick, to escabe one of your verdamdt destroyers. We went so quick we look like neffer

comin' up any more, an' Nekker cry like a child. I go to him, but . . ." He paused, then added, "*Ach!* Zat is wot I mean. Listen! *Vacilis descensus Averni. . .* Iss it? Only a born fool would use ze planes like zat. Listen!"

He waited with the calm of one who read precisely what risk they ran; who faced the end and knew that he faced it—while a man whose "nerf was gone" ordered events which might carry them all into the beyond. In the unseen Central Control this person touched levers, buttons, switches—perhaps as a child might touch them; or with the intent, born of some strange whim, to end the strain which had debauched him.

The noise of the surface machinery ceased, and in its absence came a silence filled with mysterious whisperings, bubblings, groans as of the lost souls in Dante's Purgatorio.

Haines felt the thrill of it. He was clad now, free in the sense that he remained unfettered; but the sudden stillness, charged as it was with uncanny noises, spasmodic, irresponsible and coupled with the swift sinking, went far to make him leap. Yet he stood his ground. Intuitively he clutched at a holdfast and leaned back. He glanced about him. There were the four walls of the cabin, and an analyst Herr Doctor who chewed peppermints standing, his finger on the pulse of the machine they both footed.

"*Ach!* How deep does he go?"

The whispered comment reached Haines and, in spite of himself, he shivered. Then came the monosyllable of a German at war with forces he could not control:

"*Gut!*" And a moment later, "He has regain gommand. . ."

He glanced up at Haines, the sidelong look of one with heavy brows, accustomed to the quiet of a library and his chair. He nodded several times in quick succession, as though assuring himself that his diagnosis was correct, and again became the narrator of events which had passed, the commentator on those which were in being.

"He has levelled her out," he said. "Now the motors begin zair song an' we haff peace if we fall across no more pockets."

The whine recommenced as he spoke. "The witch-music of the Naiads in *Walkure*," he decided, one finger lifted to point his meaning. "Wagner knew before *unterseeboot* arrive—so! And Wagner was madt . . . only the madt hear tings which haff never been." His brows became puckered. "I would giff all I have to know wot music rings in Von Nekker's ears at zis

moment. . . . Pah ! as I was saying w'en zis interlude occur ; we dive in the North Sea to escape from your destroyer. We dive so sudden where it is shoal zat we stick with our nose in ze sand. For an hour we move not at all, an' w'en I come to Von Nekker he joust point at manometer, an' say, ' Look ! Look ! Where in Hell she reach ? '

" An' I look an' see it register more zan one hundred metres. Von Nekker in ze meantime shout in my ear who am not deaf, ' One hundred an' twenty-seven metres where zere is only forty metres—ze sea is linked wiz these Englanders.'

" He make a big noise. I was ashamed for ze men would 'ear, an' got him quiet an' we worked ze tanks, an' wriggled about wiz ze screws an' pushed zis way an' zat, till presently she came out of ze 'ole she make, an' we lie on ze bottom to get calm. Zat was ezential. . . . Oh yes ! Ezential. . . ."

Haines asked as he paused, shaking his head, what was the reason of the manometer registering as it did, and he turned to explain :

" Mud in ze mouth of ze tube, mud which presently an engineer blow out, mud from goin' down so fast—but Von Nekker find mud bad for control. It block ozzer tubes beside manometer tube. It block Von Nekker . . . make 'im see snakes w'ere no snakes are ; make 'im see ze bottom of ze sea comin' up to meet 'im effery time he dive. Zat is bad, bad for gommander of U-boat. It bring danger to uzzers. It make me nerfous." He reached out and took a biscuit from the tin. " Eat," he ejaculated. " It is goot to eat effen if to-morrow we die."

CHAPTER III

VON NEKKER

ON the morrow, however, the Commander was still sane. He kept very much to himself, constantly visited the Control and ignored Haines' presence. He snapped when addressed, damned the heat, which was humid, flung off his tunic and again put it on—as though, on consideration, he had decided that if the heavens fell, buttons and gold lace were essential.

As the day grew he seemed to acquiesce in the freedom Haines enjoyed; at all events, he did nothing to alter a condition of affairs which had been brought about by the doctor. He had the air of a man seeking to hide from his subordinates facts which he knew were patent to all.

Before war was declared Haines learned Von Nekker was an officer in the service of the Hamburg-Amerika Line, and his ambition was to hold the blue-ribbon of the Atlantic, if possible as Commander. A year earlier he had been in the service of the Eastern Mail and steadily sending all the information he could master to his owners. But when he learned in August, 1914, that England meant to join hands with France and Russia, he decided that England was bluffing. He swore it. She had no Army. Her Fleet was racked by dissension, tossing hats over the Fisher school, or the Beresford school as of old, and honeycombed by intolerance.

He was able to put his finger on countless facts which advised him that England—by which term he adumbrated the British Empire—would be beaten. It was unfortunate England had decided to fight. She would be punished for that. His hatred grew with the knowledge that to administer punishment would have its repercussions.

He explained these matters to Haines quite openly during the afternoon watch. The weather had improved and he was in high feather, laughing at English ways and at their softness for what he called the Herd. It appeared that he had been compelled to leave the Eastern Mail because he had knocked a Lascar down and broken his arm. "Soft!" he ejaculated, "a sure sign of a Nation on the down-grade." He shrugged it out and continued, "My relation who is head of Hamburg-Amerika Service was not pleased. He expected much from me as Captain in the Eastern Mail—and here I am, forced to begin again, join the Reserve an' prepare for ziss . . ."—he indicated the war with a sweep of his hand—"an' I have to get in U-boat service, while you come in an' make it hell."

"If we hadn't come in we should have been snuffed out," Haines explained.

"Snuffed? *Ja!* . . . now you will be snuffed. My father tell me always to fight for myself . . . *Selbst ist der Mann*, you know what that means?"

Haines nodded.

"Treitschke said it," the Commander emphasized, "a great German. My father said that only an Englander appreciated that maxim. It was the law on which England grew fat. He say, too, that is the reason why Englanders refuse military service; but I think he was wrong. It is because Englishmen are afraid . . . and now," he growled out, his fingers plucking at the collar of his tunic, "I am Commander of U-boat, as you call her, and a verdammt doctor makes reports to my Chief!"

He made his exit over this with a slammed door, while Haines remained to question his balance. Afraid! Well, perhaps. One day it might come to the test—Nekker or Haines. Then it would be seen where fear lay.

The doctor came in almost at once and Haines remarked on the fact. He got for his pains—"I cannot at ziss moment onderstand w'y 'e so good to you. 'E not do it before . . . but it useful for you. Per'aps 'e fat you up for by an' by."

"Not much chance of that here," Haines gasped. "If it goes on like this, a sheet of blotting-paper is all you'll need to carry me."

"Wot?"

"I don't think it will bear repeating, Herr Doktor. I am flabby as a bath towel and badly in need of one."

"Take ziss," said his mentor. He opened a drawer and offered a sweat-rag. "It is ber'aps better zan nussing. *Ach!*" he groaned. "Ze watch below wake up because the sweat run down zair faze an' blind zair eye . . . it iss *holsch!*"

He stood watching Haines as he mopped his face, interested in minor details, heavy of mien. The submarine sloped suddenly, and there arose the gurgling whine of pumps while both men swayed maintaining their balance. "*Ach!* So," came in comment from the doctor. "Ze Gommander find more pockets. Zese seas are full of zem an' we do like horse in steeplechase. Hot watter come from Gulf Stream, an' down go ze nose of us till we play wiz tanks an' make 'im gome back again. Bad, zat; bad for Nekker. He swear. I giff a good deal if zere iss no Nekker."

A small doll which sat on the electric clock fell to the deck with the inclination, and the doctor stooped to pick it up. "Zum! W're you gome from?" he asked, his gaze quizzically on Haines.

"I supposed it was your mascot," said the prisoner.

"So?" The doctor became still with the word, his brows puckered over pursed lips. "You belief in zat stuff?" he asked.

"Why not? It's as good a kind of foolery as any other," Haines laughed.

"But you belief zat it brocures safety?"

"No, no—I neither believe nor doubt. It's funny, so I let it stay—that's all there is to it."

The doctor-paymaster shrugged incomprehension. "I sought," he said, "zat ze English peobles haff belief in wot zay call ze evvicacy of prayer; but zey belief also in ze evvicacy of mascots zey tie on zair motors, on zair sheeps an' carry wiz zem in zair haversacks—so I say you all mad together an' we win zis war. . . ." He paused and glanced around. "Hist! Nekker come. He very matt. I go for to study navigacion," he whispered.

He left the cabin like a fat wraith, and Haines found himself wondering which of the trio was mad and what that had to do with the navigation of an U-boat, moving fifty or sixty feet below the surface. He heard the whine of machinery, noted the swing-like poise of the craft and leaned over the table too drowsy to think, too hot and spiritless to consider what happened.

It was immaterial. Life, after all, was but a series of events—one damned thing following in the track of another. Some day they would all be dead—one with a crown, the other with a fire to comfort him. . . . Bah! the heat was intense. Sweat trickled down the side of his nose. It tasted salt. . . . he could not think why!

A small sound disturbed him—or was it a lurch? He looked up, his wits at fault, his eyes wet and smeared. He had imagined the snap of a trigger, Nekker pulling it, and the Commander stood there watching him. That was queer! These people moved about without sound. . . . but there was no pistol. The click of the latch as the door closed behind Nekker doubtless produced that syllogism, and Haines found himself silently condemning this U-boat atmosphere and a Captain who always moved in rubber shoes. Then, with a great effort, Haines pulled himself up, noting the man's pose, his drawn face and the smile on lips

which seemed to say "Caught!" and to chuckle over the fact that others felt what he felt—down there, under sea.

Nekker made no comment. He stood there with his tunic open at the throat, the nervous tension evident in every move, and said, as though answering Haines' dream, "I have not put you out, as you call it, because you belong to the Eastern Mail. If I had known your ship belong to my old service I should sink her all the same; but I should have given you time to get away in your boats. I should not have shell your boats at all. I am sorry I shell them. . . ."

Haines had no knowledge of what had occurred and said so, adding, "It is not war. It is murder and too horrible for belief."

"We have our orders and must obey them," Nekker barked. "*Spurlos versenkt*"—he mouthed the phrase, his eyes making a rapid search of the cabin—"you know what that means?"

Haines shook his head.

"Sink and leave no trace," the Commander explained. "No trace," he reiterated, head thrust forward, eyes scared—"that is why we sink them so. I think our High Command are all mad together, otherwise they would not give us zose orders. Perhaps uzzers not feel it as I do, for I am half English. I was born in the West-country; but it was well for me that I had been educated in Germany and that my people were of the ruling caste. I was trained, too, and could enter the Navy. What else remained for me? It was war. I had to choose."

"No doubt it was difficult," Haines shrugged, seeing Nekker awaited it.

"Difficult! Yes—with England gone mad."

Haines watched through half-closed eyes. He desired quiet. The motion of this prison of his required watching; it contained forces he did not understand, which he tried to read from the sounds which constantly varied, and could not. "It seems to me," he said while the sweat trickled down his sides, "that you are content with your theories. Frankly I would rather not discuss them."

"Why not? If we not talk we get melancholia. I certainly." He tapped his chest with quick blows. "Wot is there to talk of? Only what we eat, what we drink . . . why we fight, hein?"

A sudden ping-like sound, as of a bullet striking a target, brought the man round. His eyes flickered, he glanced at the manometer and resumed his plaint. "There are differences between German people and English people—silly differences.

We are penned in ; you are free. We believe in Force ; you believe in Gristian Science. We know the Herd are fools and have no mind to be ruled by them. War is an instrument ! ” He hammered this on his chest with quick tappings. “ If we do not make hell of war it go on like your wars for ever. Stupid beyond words, that. Your people have become soft. We produce brain while you produce muscle for sports. You steal all these lands you govern with Ghristian Science and forget it is necessary to fight. So, we steal now—steal with our armies, with our undersea boat, while your Herd turn Pacifist . . . what else ? Hell. Nothing else——” He sat suddenly on the edge of the settee. “ And here, in this verdamnt stewpan, is silence, surmise—horrible ! ”

He twisted before Haines mouthing phrases, the words pouring forth in a hot and babbling stream. His eyes registered each phase of passion, fear, argument, truculence in turn. He may have plumed himself on the impression he produced ; or it may have been the result of head-weariness, the force that was operating on Haines. Then suddenly the twitching increased, and “ *Selbst ist der Mann !* ” he rapped out. “ What matter anything, so that I win ? That is war. So I sink and kill and make Hell at sea to order of All-Highest, so that I may win bromotion, orders, crosses . . . if that verdamnt doctor please.”

Again the ping-like note, and Nekker rose, crossed to the door and stood listening.

Silence met him. The fish-shaped machine that carried them hummed as before. A hissing noise arose as the tanks were trimmed. Sometimes there came a burst of energy, then a long-drawn whine ; and with each sound Nekker’s eyes acknowledged the tension. He came back to his seat and leaned forward, his cheeks pale, a duct for the sweat which trickled down.

“ I give my soul for Germany,” he snapped, “ but Germany think I not do enough. It sends a spy-man to make reports to my Chief—*Ach !* and in the streets people call after us because we not end the war in three months. *Ach !* I have no patience. I am not able to sleep . . . and all the time this doctor watch me—takes notes ! ”

He sat back with a jerk, tapping the settee with the flat of his palm, his eyes bleared, red-rimmed, cruel. The drone of his words troubled Haines no more than the doctor’s plaint. It was all one—and dangerous ; but Nekker refused quiet, he bubbled again. “ I give effry ship I meet short shift to show I am German

of the Germans," he hammered out, "yet they call me Englisher. Me! Good! Free me of this verdamnt doctor, or I shall forget I was in English ships and find out where you keep your *Mauritania* an' sink her like I sunk the *Lusitania* . . ."

Haines no longer drowsed. He leaned forward with the old rage stirring him, saying swiftly, "Do you mean that? You aren't balmy, are you?"

"Balmy . . . what *you* mean?"

"You said you sank the *Lusitania*," Haines growled, moving nearer. "Is that true?"

"True? Yes. Why not? I win that time if you win at Falkland Islands. The long arm, hein? The arm of your Jacky Fisher when he reach out to murder our fine men who win at Coronel is not longer than the arm of the U-boat which makes an end of American trickery . . ."

"You damned liar!"

Haines was white to the tips of his ears. He came close, watching his opportunity. Nekker rose too, his eyes flickering as before. He was flushed, angry. "You threaten?" he asked, tongue out to moisten his lips.

Haines made no reply. He saw that Nekker's hand reached for the automatic he carried, and sprang upon him.

"If you weren't sick I would strangle you!" he growled. "Drop that pistol! You sank the *Lusitania*, did you? God!" He held him in a vice and the pistol fell. "You crow over it!" He pushed back the man's head, wrenching at his chin till it seemed he would carry out his threat. But it was impossible. The noise made in that confined space was sufficient to bring aid. The door opened and the verdamnt doctor entered with an orderly, while from the forward end came a sailor, stripped to the waist and gleaming with sweat and oil.

They seized Haines, and in a moment he was helpless, ironed, with Nekker standing over him babbling German with the voice of a monkey clamouring for a stolen nut.

"For zwei pin," he shouted, rage in his eyes, "I would shoot you w're you stand!"

"It would be more like your damned methods," Haines snapped, "if you crucified me first."

"You sink so? Good. By God! I do it."

He turned and gave orders in German, while Haines in a cold sweat was marched back to the tank-like chamber which had accommodated him during his first hours as a prisoner.

It was not exactly the place he would have chosen, but he was comforted to some extent by the doctor, who leaned over him and said, not unkindly, "Why you mage 'im angry? Wot I dell you? You might haff been dead."

"If you had left us alone another minute Nekker would have been dead," Haines answered.

"Zum!" said the doctor in his slowest manner. "I wonder!"

He shook his head over this and moved back to the exit; got outside, looked up and down the alley-way and pushed in his head to say:

"Keep quiet... by and by I gome again. I giff you ze chance."

With that the iron door clanged and Haines was at liberty to consider the end.

CHAPTER IV

BRING THE RED BOOK

DAYS dragged their slow length over Dorking as over Falmouth, where Jimmy paced the small bridge of H.M.S. *Chanticleer* thinking of Dorothea and praying for that half stripe. But for Jimmy and his brothers there was movement, and incentive; at Low Willows and the Rectory the stillness of a grey winter with ignorance for companion. No one knew what was happening. Greyness and rain saw the day wane; blackness and rain accompanied night on her journey towards the dawn. No lights in the streets; no gleam from window or lantern. Motor-lamps screened by a diaphragm of green, the street lamps in mourning for a world which courted death; the Downs far in the north grimly emulating the clouds which usually screened them.

In the trenches Buz and his men stood to arms before dawn and pretended in letters they liked it. At moments known as "stand easys" they were free to lounge in wet dug-outs or lean against pit-props or sandbags, and were too sodden to absorb more moisture, too weary to care that they were wet. In the North Sea the Fleet remained where it remained—a shadow which no sailor might discuss. Round about it men saw the Island Base bleached by snow, lashed by rain and hail. Gales from all quarters passed over it thunder-laden. Rumours, wireless, talk of that enemy hidden far off for whom the Navy eternally yawned; which some one had promised to dig out—and the knowledge that it was not dug out, nor ever would be, exasperating those who had been indicated as the diggers.

To sweep the North Sea meant the possibility of an action for which all prayed; something, at all events, to stir the blood—but to lie in that island-locked Base and watch the rain lick clean the rocks was death-like; slow and very sure, without that querulous taunt which swept up with the rain to find a sting for those who waited.

It was this that brought within the Navy that band of confederates known as "the death or glory" boys, sometimes even as "the Suicide club." They were the men who would volunteer for any hazard; men stung by the slur behind that question of the newspapers—"What is the Navy doing?" They were the men who hated the processes which led to stalemate, who knew the Navy was tied and made possible the spirit which culminated in the glorious dash at Zeebrugge.

Whatever the women of England missed of actual fighting, they won in full by waiting. In spite of a tension which daily became more terrible, they went about their tasks as before. They became Nurses, V.A.D.'s, took situations in shops, thronged to find work in factory and shipyards—or stood patiently in queues for long hours to buy food. All England took part here: rich and poor trudged in the rain carrying string bags, baskets and a little book of tickets to bring home the rations on which they lived.

And it was in the rain one evening after service that the Rector crossed the churchyard and entered his home. No fire glowed in the hall, a fairy lamp gave all the light, and the guns out there on Flanders' Plain rumbled, shaking the hills.

He came in less buoyantly than of old. For several nights he had lain with fear for a pillow, waiting for the cessation of gunfire; but it had not come. As he stood in the hall he recognized the dull thunder which went on and on, marking the stress of our men at the Front—the line which held Buz; which bent, but never yet had broken.

Mrs Haines had returned from the church without waiting, so that the study might be lighted and the blinds secured when he came in. The house was cold and damp. One fire only burned in addition to that in the kitchen, for coal was scarce and costly already. He moved across to enter, a smile and a prayer on his lips. "Our part"—that was his thought; then the study door opened and he saw his wife's face.

She came towards him holding in her hand the telegram which all expected and prayed might never come.

"From the War Office, dear—from . . ." She came close and broke down, her head bowed on his shoulder as he hastened to her aid.

"Let me see it," he said. "One moment . . . my glasses——"

He fumbled reaching them, petting her as he did so with the free hand, adjusted them, then looked over. "Which is it?" he whispered. "Is it Buz . . . has he gone?"

"No, no—Jag." She leaned on him, sobbing. "I have sent for Dorothea. She was in church."

"You said the War Office," he told her. "Patience, dear soul . . . give me your help. Jag!"

He adjusted the glasses anew and strove to read.

"Admiralty!" he said through his teeth. Then he read, conscious of the shock he sustained. His hand trembled as he stroked his wife's hair.

"The Secretary of the Admiralty regrets to inform you that S.S. Vulcan, W. A. Haines, Master, was torpedoed by enemy submarine off the Burlings on 3rd inst. Boat with survivors picked up. Transferred trawler under orders for Falmouth. Expect arrival Friday. Captain Haines not among them, but Admiralty hopeful other boats may yet be found by search parties."

The Rector found a glimmer in this. His pulse became stronger. He refused despair. "Oh, but there is hope here . . . hope, dear heart! Where is Dorothea? . . . He can't be gone! We dare not give way on that. . . . It is Jag, my soul! Jag! who always gets there by aiming some other whither. Jag! Poor boy!" He bowed over the name. "Some other whither! . . . Don't you remember? Ah! there is Dorothea. . . . Come in, come in . . . you are cold as the rain."

Dorothea took his disengaged arm and they entered together. "When did it happen?" she begged, her voice strangely under command.

He drew them to the fire, put them in chairs, closed the door.

"On the third," he answered, and glanced at the message to verify the words.

"Yes—but this is the twenty-fifth! Three weeks! Why are they so late with their news?" Dorothea asked.

He looked across at them. It was a question he had not considered. Three weeks! Well, that put it in rather a worse light . . . worse. Decidedly worse. He glanced at his wife, and remembered suddenly that a man could scarcely live for three weeks in an open boat. Even the strongest must fail in three weeks. Then a new question arose to puzzle him. The Burlings. Where were the Burlings—what were they? He put this in the form which at the moment seemed best: "Have you any idea where they are . . . these Burlings?"

"Yes. Off the coast of Portugal."

"I thought you might know . . . far or near the coast?"

"Not far."

"Then he may have got to the land! No—I refuse to despair. Jag is Jag. Not far? Then he might swim . . . you know his power. And there would be the possibility of being seen and picked up by . . . I suppose they have lifeboats and coastguards in Portugal?"

Dorothea did not know. She was marvellously, calm but there

was a look in her eyes, a suggestion of terror, that troubled those who watched.

"Your atlas, my dear," the Rector pleaded to rouse Mrs Haines. "It may help us."

The book was found. After a brief search the islets were discovered, minute pinnacles piercing the Atlantic. God ! how small they appeared. Near them a point of land jutted out from the coast, a low sandy neck which the Rector instantly visualized as a landing-place. There, under that point, fishing-boats would lie—the lateen-rigged vessels with eyes painted on their bows so that they might see in the dark or in fog when otherwise they would be blind.

He drew a picture of them as they had appeared long years before when he had taken a trip in a tramp steamer in search of strength after the labours of an East End curacy. But Dorothea found small encouragement in this. She begged for something more definite. She could not rest without knowing more. Even the worst was preferable to suspense, waiting on the words of men who would allow three weeks to elapse ere they sent tidings. Then suddenly she remembered Sir Douglas had instructed her to get ready her passport days ago—weeks, perhaps ! . . . Did he know—then ?

"I must telephone," she decided. "Sir Douglas will help me . . . can I ? It will be a trunk call. I may be able to get him. He may know more . . . I am sure he will know more."

The Rector agreed. He went away with the number she gave, "C.C.W.15 London," rang, and received a promise from the Exchange in reply. They would ring up when the line was clear.

They sat down to wait, the door open to the telephone room. Half an hour passed. The clock ticked, struck each quarter. Rain beat on the study windows. Sometimes the Rector sat, sometimes walked to and fro behind the chairs of those who waited by the fire. They were so quiet in the room that it gave the impression they were engaged in prayer.

Again the clock rang its chime. It was growing late, they might not be able to get through. All the wires were blocked with messages urging necessity for their plea. The Rector thought it would be advisable to call again—then, as he entered the room to do so, the bell rang.

He called sharply to Dorothea and she joined him. She took up the receiver and said, "Yes, hallo ! Who is it ?" And a

voice came through, faint as it seemed, which said, "Admiralty War Staff, room fifteen."

"Is Sir Douglas Clancy there?"

"He is in the building—who is speaking?"

"Dorothea Nesbit."

"Who?"

"Dorothea Nesbit—his godchild. He told me to ring him up. . . . Ask him to spare me a moment."

A pause ensued. How prosaic it all was! Waiting just as though one desired to give an order to one's grocer or butcher . . . and Jag Haines might be dying while she waited. Dying—dying! The receiver registered sounds at the Admiralty, the tooting of horns outside, the talk of men engaged on a joke . . . She could not tell what. The sounds increased, then suddenly one spoke whose words were plain:

"Hallo! Hallo!"

She made answer in the stereotyped fashion: "Dorothea speaking. . . . Is that Admiral Clancy?"

"Yes—bad news, I fear."

Dorothea told him her news, how it had come, what she wished to do. Had anything fresh come in from the search party?

"Nothing yet. That may be good news or it may be bad. Come to Town to-morrow. Bring your father with you. Come here and I will see you. Do all I can, you may be sure. Meanwhile pack your bag and be ready to go down into Cornwall. Bring the red book. Don't lose heart. Not hearing is often the best news. Get up as early as you can and 'phone me from Town. . . . Is that clear?"

"Quite, quite clear."

"Right. Good night. Get to sleep, and keep fit. Meanwhile we will look into it."

"Good night. . . . You know how I thank you. Good night."

The receiver twanged. They were cut off. Prosaic. Cold. Not a vestige of sympathy in a machine which throbbed hourly of the stress of mankind . . . and Jag might be dying as it twanged.

CHAPTER V

JIMMY

FALMOUTH, like other ports in the war zone, was a Naval and Military centre of considerable importance. No one could pass its barriers without a permit, and to get one might take a month or longer. In Dorothea's case the red book was supplemented by a Naval Pass and a letter from Sir Douglas to the S.N.O. at the Base. He also gave instructions to avoid the Military area.

"Keep with the sailors," he said. "We work together admirably, and I have nothing but praise for Army Commands; but there may be a crank down there. I know less than nothing of the Centre. Besides, you will have young Haines to look after you. If he fails, report him to me."

That evening Dorothea saw a London station in war trappings for the first time. She was travelling by the Naval special which now lay at the platform exuding steam at every pore. Crowds stood about waiting, and as she walked with her father the vaulted roof tingled with the patter of rain. It gave the impression of an enormous vault filled with energy, wracked with sighs, in which the shades of men chattered of honour, duty, justice, peace in a fleeting chiaroscuro, as factors in the game of life which never would be found again.

Officers of the Staff were there, men of the King's Messenger Service, officers and men of the Fleet—all with their coterie of friends grouped about the doors, or pacing slowly up and down near them, smoking, watchful of the time. Guards came past; girl-porters moved by carrying bundles, kit-bags, swords, luggage of men on Service, men tearing themselves away from their women-folk—all without exception men going back to the war zone.

Dorothea watched this kaleidoscopic scene with the avidity of one to whom it was new until a whistle sounded, then said good-bye as others said it, and took her seat. Men and officers were waving hands, blanched faces staring up at those who waved. Tears stood in eyes above lips which smiled. Laughter came from the carriages. Doors were slammed upon it . . . girls, women and old men, Mr Nesbit among them, stood resolute to garner the last smile—then the train began to move. Like a gorged snake it glided from the platform, while in the dark front section voices lifted in chorus singing:—

"Pull out, pull out on the long Trail—
The Trail that is always new!"

Dorothea, throbbing and with eyes luminous, drew down her blind and sat back to consider what she must do. It seemed difficult to deliberate long on any subject, difficult to concentrate ; for always there rang in her ears facts which troubled her, which would hold her as in a spell when the pale spectres from the boat stood near, rambling of their adventure with Fritz.

Jimmy was on the platform to greet her as the train rolled in. She saw his face from her carriage window, the suffused light of early day upon him, laying emphasis on his shoulder-straps, on his buttons and badge and keen, smiling face which welcomed her. He was good to look upon, for he had been through the mill and could carry a cane. He appeared as part of her life, of her home at Low Willows which she had loved so passionately all the days of her youth ; but she knew also he was part of the Naval Machine. The thought came to her as one belonging especially to her present estate—grown up, affianced, at the edge of woman's great adventure. . . . Yes, it was good to see Jimmy again !

Next to a greeting from Jag, Jimmy's was desirable. Had she not prayed for him, shed tears for him ? She caught sight of the cheery salute he flung and nearly cried out, nearly waved in return. Then quite suddenly remembered that Jimmy had vanished without saying *au revoir* ; that he had never congratulated her on her engagement with Jag. . . . It was as though a blight had fallen. Yet she was glad he had come.

His presence made her feel no longer alone, no longer one of a group of tired-eye women intent on appearing vivacious at the moment of contact with friends. Dorothea was tired, and she knew it. She had not slept. Since the news came she had scarcely closed her eyes, and last night, as the train rumbled in tunnels or rushed like a meteor through wayside stations, she felt the burden of wakefulness as no young thing should.

The woman in the berth above hers had troubled her. She shook the bed with vain tossings, and once, when they were halted at a signal and the train drowsed, she heard her sob. That made Dorothea long to howl, as she expressed it ; but pride held her from that luxury. Besides, it might not be necessary to howl. Jag might have arrived. Sir Douglas had laid stress on this phase. He said that silence after a tragedy so often meant that the men had been picked up and were being carried somewhere—often still farther away, and speech was impossible. “ If they tell you

he is gone, don't believe 'em. Wait." And she tried to assure herself now that she had faith.

But when she saw Jimmy the flood-gates were opened. She dashed at her tears and held out her hand. He caught it in his, pressed it drawing her near, drawing her close. "It *is* good to see you," he laughed. "Just a bit of the old times come back—only *I* welcome you! Good, good! What a time you must have had . . . all alone, too!"

"Have you news for me?" she asked, her eyes gleaming.

"None. . . . They should not have let you travel alone in these days." He seemed surprised the Padre's pass had not arrived and that her father had none. Of the two families, apparently Dorothea was the only one equipped.

"Good old Whirlwind!" He laughed again, obviously keen on keeping up her spirits. "No red books, eh? Luck!" He did not say whose. "I told the Owner"—Jimmy always called his father by that name—"last time I was on leave to get it in order . . . said he might want it at any time, by George! . . . and here you are travelling solo because he hasn't done it. Well, I suppose he will be along some day. Where is your dunnage?" Jimmy inferred by this phrase that he wished to look up her luggage. "I've got a porter—a *he* one. We'll go and rake it out when you are ready."

Dorothea decided to start at once and they posted off to the van. "Khaki, eh!" Jimmy commented, his eyes roving to her dress. "Wonderful how that gets you about! Suits you too. You look the part . . . got leave, I suppose?"

"Yes—but what news have you?" Dorothea questioned.

"Not a syllable."

"Oh! and I did so long for a word. . . ." She stood still, her eyes luminous. Jimmy thought them all he had thought them before, but more pathetic. "It will come," he told her. "Anyhow, I have to look after you, and . . . I say! You *aren't* crying, are you?"

Dorothea brushed at the tears and looked up, smiling. "No."

Jimmy regarded her from the detached standpoint of an unengaged man. He wished girls always said what they meant, while they *were* girls. Afterwards it didn't matter. "Good!" he rolled out to reassure her. "It's no sort of earthly going in for feeling these days. Poor old Jag! Well, he'll be holing out presently. All you have to do is to wait."

The old shibboleth! It sounded brutal on Jimmy's lips. Yet

they all said it in varying fashion. Sir Douglas made a blessing of it ; Jimmy as though he had talked with Joss and knew. That is why it sounded heartless—she shrugged at the word, pointing, “That’s my trunk. D.N. and a blue stripe. Nothing else but the suit-case.”

“I’ll hang on to that ; then we’ll get a droschke and get along to the hotel,” said Jimmy. “Expect you’ll be glad of a tub. It’s full of brass hats and gorget patches—but there’s nowhere else.”

Jimmy’s phrasing left much to the imagination. The Rector said he talked like a machine. He knew all the words, but had no knowledge of their meaning. To which his son replied :

“Result of ruling snotties, sir, when you’re young.” He referred to experiences gained as a “Wart” and as a One-striper in the gunroom. Luckily, Dorothea understood.

They passed the sergeant sitting at a little deal table and entered the droschke. On the way to the hotel Jimmy asked what time Dorothea would be ready to “make her number,” which was new and puzzling. She said as much.

“Introduce you to the Admiral, you know,” Jimmy explained.

Dorothea did not know ; but she had a letter from Sir Douglas which she must present, and said so.

“Good !” Jimmy announced. “That’s topping ! Our Chief’s Sheldon, no end of a tartar, but a rare one for the Cinderella-men, as he calls them.”

“Cinderella-men ?” she questioned, laconic as her guide. “Who are they ?”

“Merchant Service chaps. Some of them belong to the Curly Gang, some of ’em don’t. Of the two I like those who don’t best.” He chuckled over the phrase.

“I don’t pretend to understand,” she smiled. “I suppose it’s some sort of nickname for the Merchant Service.”

“R.N.R.’s,” Jimmy informed her. “Wiggle-waggle stripes, you know. The Fleet’s full of ’em—can’t stick ’em for nuts.”

Dorothea made no reply. The droschke drew up and Jimmy alighted. “I’m not a thought-reading Johnny, or any kind of a prophet,” he said ; “but I believe I’ve put your back up without meaning to.”

“I hate to hear you sneer at the Merchant Service,” she said in her direct way. “I don’t know what you would do without it, or without the Curly Gang, as you call them.”

“Sorry,” he tossed back. “I’m always putting my foot in it. Let’s get in . . . ripping outlook, isn’t it ?”

Dorothea faced seaward. The sky was grey, the wind light ; but rollers came in from the sou'-west, dashed against Pendennis and fell back in a smother of foam. They came in serried lines from the blue distance where U-boats cruised and the Cinderella-men fought with bare fists, resolute, and undaunted as the sea after its contest with Scilly. They came laden with hints, cries, shouts from mast-head and prow ; whispers which told of torture prolonged and so ghastly that jaws fell back with the rattle which is death . . . and Dorothea looked out upon the sea considering these things. Her lip quivered, but she said, " Yes, it's fine . . . so fine I dare not think. Let us go in."

They entered and stood together discussing plans ; then the girl shook off her restraint and looked at Jimmy. " I haven't thanked you for meeting me," she smiled. " It didn't seem necessary, because you are Jimmy. We always did spar, but I couldn't have managed so well alone." She put her hand on his arm as he stood before her, a crowd of brass hats watching and envious. " Are you ever serious ? " she asked.

" Never," said he. " Couldn't do my job if I thought."

" Ah ! Yes, I forgot that. I was troubled, you see—where are you staying ? "

" Boat's in dock for a few days, refitting after a bit of a scrap . . . "

" And you didn't tell me ! "

" Thought you were fed up with bad news," he blurted. " Lost the Owner and three bluejackets, a number wounded as well. Had to bring her in on my own."

Dorothea caught his hand. " I am so thankful ! " she said swiftly ; " you weren't hurt, were you ? What should I have done if you had been wounded ? "

" Nursed me, I hope. We want your sort down here," he laughed.

She drew back instantly. " I hate you in that vein," she whispered. " No—I am tired. Come for me at three and we will go to see this Admiral who talks of the Cinderella-men. I should think he could be interesting."

" He is," said Jimmy. And with that he left her.

CHAPTER VI

JAG

GUN-FIRE penetrated the recess where Haines lay and he turned stiffly to listen. He fancied he heard cheering ; but in a minute that died. He felt faint, perhaps from hunger, and his mind drifted into irrelevancies . . . what time was it . . . where was he . . . why was it dark ? The water rilled up to him and drained away. He lay in a pool of it wet to the skin.

He remembered presently the doctor and glanced round to find the gleam he had left when last he had visited him ; but it was gone. Again the gun boomed and there came an earthquake. Every plate and stringer thrilled to it, why Haines could not at the moment think. He lay there lolling from side to side as the submarine rolled ; very tired, very hungry, thirsty . . . everything.

After a long interval came a steep inclination, the whining noises of the tanks, the rush of water which flooded them. He dug with his heels and hands into the ribs and lapping of the plates which made his bed . . . but the noise was all subdued, far off, like the hum of dynamos in that sector where Nekker was in control and perhaps was playing the fool.

The angle was so steep that Haines slid the length of his prison in spite of the tension he exerted. He reached a transverse angle-iron and rested there sweating yet shivering as with ague. . . . Then came a crash, appalling, tremendous, and the frail craft seemed to leap under him ; to quake and collapse—to slide and suddenly become still.

Haines found himself on one elbow, listening ; his thoughts racing. Some one called him. He took no heed. His eyes were fixed on the dark, searching it, striving to interpret sounds ; listening for the dynamos, listening for the pumps, for the voice which had called, and instead of these things came a new inclination, swift, steep, and he clutched at the stringers with chained hands, fear mastering him.

It seemed necessary that he should be free. It did not occur to him he would be equally helpless free. He desired to make a fight of it, if it came to that, and not to acquiesce without a struggle in the death of a rat trapped in a sewer. His feet were against the bulkhead now, the water racing past. He felt the buzz which fills the ears of those who drown . . . then again came

that deep, baying roar which seemed to take the submarine, Haines and all who were on board and fling them stunned upon the sea.

The noise was a crash, enormous, terrifying, yet deadened as by the wearing of ear-guards. The boat quivered, lurched and seemed to fall into some region whence no sound comes. And when they reached it, Haines lay still.

A beam of light pierced the darkness coming from the man-hole when Haines again became conscious of life. He twisted, dazzled. Some one had called him. His name seemed to roll as in a cavern. He looked about him, and a voice heavy with the smell of peppermint assailed him. "Drink ziss," it said with the persistence of one who has repeated the phrase till he is tired.

Haines presently discovered the doctor crouching over him, and like a child he reached out to touch his arm, asking, "What was that noise?"

"*Wasser-bomben* . . . wot you call dess [depth] charge. *Hollsh!*"

"Some one trying to put us out?" Haines guessed.

"*Ja!* if you lige it better zo. But she not put out." He lifted Haines, holding the cup to his lips. "Drink," he urged. "It will do goodt. Quick!—I have a long time waited."

Haines complied. It seemed just then immaterial what he drank, whether it were poison or stimulant. He was weary. His head throbbed, buzzed like the dynamos. In all his experience he could not recall a similar sensation. The stuff was bitter and he drew back, but the doctor pressed it on him. "Finish," he persuaded. "In a minute it haff effect if you take all. I know wot I do—drink!"

And again Haines drank.

"Where is Captain Nekker?" he asked as the doctor sat up.

"In ze gontrol. He not come out again, I sink. He drust no one, not effen himself, after ziss. By an' by I have to go an' administer to heem oxygen, or"—he glanced about—"vind sdraight-jacket for to put on heem."

"Then he is worse?" Haines commented.

"He is matt," the doctor agreed, "an' the crew is matt also. Presently we haff mutiny. Eat more vood." He opened a case of sandwiches and pressed them on him. "Zese not musty wiz ziss verdamnt air like all vood to-day is. Zay are for emergency. W'y you anger heem an' cause zis gontre-daump? I see no zense in action lige zat. I dell you 'ee dangerous, an' now zat *wasser-*

bomben haff shake heem all to peices. I know not wot 'ee do when 'ee see you. W'y you anger heem ? ”

“ The beast told me he sank the *Lusitania*, ” Haines blurted.

“ So ? ” the doctor grunted, his head twisted. “ That is wot you gall 'allucination—ze result of mouch sinking zat 'ee would be world 'ero if 'ee could sink her. ”

“ If he did sink her, ” Haines tossed back, “ I would kill the brute even if it meant the end. ”

“ So ? Meanwhile I veed you up for to navigate us, ” the doctor protested.

“ Did he torpedo the *Lucy* ? ” Haines shot out.

“ Piff ! I sink 'ee not wiz-in a t'ousand mile of 'er when she go. I sink you are a vool. Wot gan you do to Nekker 'ere ? 'Ee top dog. You not 'av mouch chance w'ile you tied up lige you are. ”

Haines refused further argument. He decided to take food and keep fit. He watched this man who sat heavily over him providing sandwiches which did not taste of sweat and oil and bilge-water, his brain heavy with plans which Haines could not read, and suddenly heard him speak in a new key.

“ *Der frisch fröhliche Krieg !* ” he growled out. “ Wot you call ziss new war lark. . . . So ? Zat is w'ot our peobles call it when it begin—*der frisch fröhliche Krieg !* But zay haff not sought of submarine, ze sweat an' blind misery that come to effry man who go in our U-boats. Zey haff not sought of *wasser-bomben*, of ze nerf strain, ze strain on eye and soul . . . *Ach !* No. Only *der Krieg—der frisch fröhliche Krieg* w'ich is to end before it begin. To end wiz effrybody killed only Shermans alive ; ze world at zair feet to kick into ze net lige you kick your football. . . . Ah ! I haff no wordts. I cannot spick wot I want to spick. I like ze man who must run, an' is cripple . . . ” He paused, breathless and perturbed, took a sandwich and commenced to eat.

“ Did the bomb do much damage ? ” Haines asked.

The doctor looked up with knitted brows, admitting, “ It might haff been worse, but, ” he continued, “ we go to make zat good at rendezvous. . . . ”

“ Where ? ”

“ Ze goast of Spain. ”

Haines had no comment to make. He was thinking ; so, too, was Herr Doktor. “ Zose irons are tight, ” he said at length. “ Too tight. I haff bring ozzers which I put on bresently. It will be more easy if I make ziss change. ”

Haines leaned nearer, seeking to read him. "You liberated me before—what is it you want me to do?"

"I tell you what I want alreaty."

"And I'm not sure I can do it," Haines tossed back.

"I sink you not matt, my frien' . . . meanwhile wot you do?"

Still Haines brooded. What did the man mean? He sat huddled somewhat in the beam of light which entered at the man-hole, his face unshadowed but inscrutable. He saw a mask, subtle, heavy, full of possibilities, balanced on a neck, short and bulging over the soiled collar of a tunic which vanished in shadow. He saw a man of strong will who had helped to make life possible for his prisoner in conditions the reverse of easy; but he could get no deeper than that. At the moment the doctor was engaged in the task of persuading Haines to give him assistance—sphinx-like since his outcry on the ghastliness of *wasser-bomben*. He faced about half smiling, and said with a shrug, "Vell—wot you make of it?"

And Haines fell back on the idiom of the sea. "Damned if I know!" he answered.

"But Nekker know," said the mask.

"If I had my way with Nekker he would know nothing."

"You play wiz words," the doctor complained. "I not understand' wot you mean, but I sink you mean good. You finish eat. I call ze guard. Go wiz zem. Take eggersize. Sink wot I spick about. *Lusitania* is gone; but Nekker is 'ere an' bresently gome zat grucifiction he spick about. I go for the study of navigation—hein?"

CHAPTER VII

TORRE DEL FUERO

FOR two hours Haines marched up and down the narrow alley-way outside his cell, resolving events, planning escapes with all the headiness of a boy. Meanwhile a sentry stood to watch him, and a gramophone clicked out the soul-stirring air of *Deutschland über Alles*, interspersed with cheers and brassy jodellings. In his heart he knew that escape was unlikely as peace; that he was a prisoner, handcuffed and on his way to crucifixion. He did not dwell on this; he acknowledged that unless something happened it would be the end. It was useless blinking that. He continued to take exercise with the methodic swing of one accustomed to the bridge until the doctor arrived with his stereotyped question:

"Vell—'ow you feel now?"

"Fit," said Haines. "Where are we?"

"On ze surface. Calm, quiet. Gome—I giff you a bit of fresh air. Nekker asleep. Gome."

He entered the Control. Men were at work there, the surface engines thumping out their toll of miles, the reek of oil everywhere. They climbed a ladder, and Haines felt the breeze entering the open hatch as they stepped past the conning-tower.

Haines made his way to one of the scuttles and looked through it. He saw the sky flaming behind a set sun, the violet of the afterglow rising over a distant range of mountains. High they towered, stained pink against the clear dome, but fading now from their earlier glory. "Ze last time I gome 'ere," said the doctor, who lounged at the adjoining scuttle, "we short of oil after waiting for ze *Chilianwallah*"—he pronounced it "Jillanvalla"—"an' we haff 'er Captain prisoner after sending his ship to zee fishes."

"'Jillanvalla'?" Haines questioned, looking round. "How do you spell it?"

"Ach! Zat is imbossible to say."

"C-h-i-l-i-a-n-w-a-l-l-a-h?" Haines suggested.

"Zo. Zat is it. Why you ask?"

"Because I was Captain of the *Chilianwallah* the voyage before she was torpedoed."

"You! Zen you were in gommand w'en she ram our U-boat off Cape Bon?"

"Yes."

"Zst!" He leaned back, laughing softly. "Ach! zat is vunny—doo vunny for words."

"Why?"

"Because you see we dake back 'er Gaptain for drial at Wilhelmshaven before ze gourt-martial appointed to do ziss kind of sing."

"Trial? Well . . . but you don't want me to understand that you shot him or anything of that sort?"

"Zst!" the doctor objected, "no make noise or zay sink we quarrel. . . . Ask Nekker. 'Ee tell you wot 'appen. I not at court-martial. I go on leaf to my 'ome."

"But the man was not in her when we sank the U 62. I don't know his name."

"Zat bad," the doctor admitted. "But 'ow we know that? You go up ze Thames crowing of wot you do, get orders an' money for doing it . . . dalk about ze bravery of your Merchant Zailors an' zen wonder sings 'appen. W'y you crow an' make speeches if you not want sings vound out? W'y you leave ze ship after you use 'er to sink our boat? *Fehr schlimm*, zat!" He chuckled over this, then added, "Vell, wot you do now?"

"I want to see Captain Nekker, sir. I want the thing cleared up."

"Zat iss not bossible 'ere. Wait. Bye'n by I find a chance. Leaf it to me . . . it sad, *fehr* sad. Nekker sleepy. We neffer wake Nekker w'en 'ee go sleep. It not 'ealsy [healthy] for zose who wake 'im. Now I go to see sings. You stay 'ere. Look out of window. No go in tower, no do anysing stupid an' bresently I come back—no?"

"Right."

"Gut! Zen I go down for infesdigations."

Haines turned to the scuttle aware that it was useless to attempt to sift this thing now; he turned, indeed, with a zest that was almost boyish to get a sniff of the sea. The long grey hull rose and fell under his eye. Ripples ran back and impinged upon the superstructure of the turret. Sometimes it welled in a greenish wash across the glass of the scuttle, and an impression of their speed was conveyed. It was good to see, good to breathe the air he knew, good to remember that flaring slope of sky looked down on England. Doretta would have watched it; the Rector noted it as he crossed to evensong. It had brooded lovingly over the old church nestling amidst the trees; thrown its soft light on mullioned windows, glazed the western turret and left the land

to-night—the early night which had lain like a benison upon the Surrey Hills.

Haines drew breath in gulps. He was greedy of its sweetness, smarting and overwrought by the long tension he had endured. The pale grey of the boat's upper-works, so whale-like as she clove the seas, held him. She became outlined in fire; the mast and other excrescences sunk in slots, drew lines with a magic pen upon the general glow. Great splashes of dull flame lunged amidst the lines of fire; luminous streaks surged past, and aft, where the screws whirled, was a bath of fire, iridescent against the violet dark.

A gong clanged in the Control, and presently Haines saw the watch arrive to relieve those "on deck." They came up damp, half naked, their eyes heavy with the torpor of hours spent in an attempt to sleep down there where sleep was an eternal fight with wakefulness, and the efforts necessary to brush sweat from eyes abrim with it. They chattered in hot whispers as they ran, strain evident—the strain which ends in melancholia and the madness of those who brood.

To avoid contact with these people Haines returned to the forward scuttle and sat down before it. Gruff orders passed—guttural, incomprehensible to one not born in the Fatherland. Haines was absorbed with the sea. The mountains were no longer visible; but far off was a cluster of lights, and to the north a light which waned and grew bright in definite rhythm. Some one in the conning-tower above him spoke, and one of the sailors passed up a small package, and again returned to his post. Presently Haines heard the flare of a Morse light, and instantly the sea and whaleback glowed red, fizzled, became green, then white, and a single magnesium ball flared to the zenith. The doctor reappeared and took his stand beside Haines. He was in a jocose mood, crammed with information.

"Wireless haff give trouble," he announced. "It go on strike lige your people w'en we want it most."

Haines said, "I suppose that is the reason you burnt your signals?"

"Wizout doubt. I myself would neffer burn zem. Nekker blay ze fool once too many times. Some day we get inderned—hein?"

"If you want oil," Haines answered as the engines slowed, "it seems necessary to run the risk."

"Nod at all!" the German thumped out. "All we need we

get out 'ere," he pointed to a small buoy. "Zair—she zuck 'erself full in 'alf hour—less!"

"Oh! of course it is possible; but d'you mean to tell me they know this over there?" He indicated the mainland with a gesture.

"*Biano!* my friendt," he shrugged heavily. "Zose peobles 'oo are joust 'ere are Shermans—effry one. No one 'oo is not Sherman know. Ze Sbanish peobles not know anysing. It is done by our people who live in Sbain. Zey wish to 'elp us. W'y not? Would you not 'elp zose you love if zey haff to fight for zair lives?"

Haines had no words for this, and the doctor, watching him, fussed up and down perturbed. Then quite suddenly he paused and said in Haines' ear, "W'ot you do if I giff you chance?"

Haines answered with his lightest touch, "Do to what?"

"Wiz Nekker," the doctor answered, pinning him down.

"Finish what I began the other day," Haines jerked out. "You seem devilish keen to get me to do your dirty work—why did you stop me then?"

"I stop you zo that bresently you able to finish wizout any one 'ear wot you do," he tossed back.

And with that he returned to the conning-tower.

Haines leaned against the steel casing of the Control. His brain was at work on the business with which presently, if the doctor's words meant anything, he would be engaged. It produced a picture, too, of the scene at Dorking when he listened to the speeches of Civic Dignitaries and Dorothea was not far off, waiting to hand him his D.S.O. Now he was in the hands of two of the Junker tribe, men who fought with their tongues and sought, each in his own way, to compass the death of his adversary through the intervention of Jag Haines.

The pressure of cold on his face fretted him, yet he stretched manacled hands high and snuggled against them throbbing. The scuttle no longer held him. The sea went flaming past, lighted by the fallow-green fires of a kiln. It ceased to allure. He recognized that here in some way was the end; that everything was subordinate to it—and turning, discovered the doctor watching out of heavy-lidded eyes.

"You go to sleep in sdrange bositions," said he.

Haines had no answer for this.

"You ready to do wot I ask?" the doctor pressed, his voice low.

"I will navigate—but I give no parole."

"You mean zat . . . no spick wizout sought ?"

"No."

"Zen I sink you are vool," said the doctor.

Haines saw nothing to challenge there. He rubbed the glass and turned to look out as a boat drew alongside.

The doctor prevented that by dropping the shutter. "W'y you change like zis?" he asked. "Haff I not 'elped you, brevented Nekker . . ."

"You have. If you set me free I will fight Nekker and take my chance; but I give no parole."

"So?"

Herr Doktor was very quiet, Haines on the verge of violence. "I sink you get matt, my vriend, zame as Von Nekker," came softly to stir Haines.

"On the contrary, I am sane enough to know what I face."

"You face death," said the German. "I haff my orders."

"So I gathered. Well?"

"I am to dake you ashore an' peg you out on ze sands below 'igh-water mark. I am to dake you now. Ze boat is gome alongzide—an' zere eis ziss *frisch fröhliche Krieg* to get vinish."

CHAPTER VIII

THE CINDERELLA-MEN

IF, when he was in the way of it, Jimmy had succeeded in getting wounded in that scrap, and could have persuaded Dorothea to act as his nurse, some advance in the conventional mode would have been possible. But Jimmy was no *poseur*, nor was he one of those who consider it their duty to make love to all pretty women. If he felt his position as the loser in the race for Dorothea's favour, he did not show it. He went for a round of golf, if possible, or took a header.

In truth he was very like his confrères in the Service. He could laugh, flirt and dance when it was possible, or smoke in the teeth of hell fire—which, when all is said, is exactly what he was trained to do. Nevertheless he was a trifle more serious than when first he met her, and for that Dorothea might thank her tears.

Jimmy had not seen her in that stage of abandon for years. It made him wish to put his arm about her, chaff and console her as he would have done long ago; but that he dared not venture. He remembered the hot flush of his ride, how the "bike" had rushed at the sidewalk willy-nilly when suddenly he had discovered his loss—how nearly he had come a cropper.

And now?

In plain truth Jimmy recognized that there are limits to a man's self-restraint; that if he ventured to comfort her he must strain her to his heart; that having done so once, he would yearn to do it again and again until shame covered them . . . or Jag came back from the infinite . . . or the Owner discovered their lapse. Hateful! It would be so easy to fail, so damned natural seeing their comradeship, the years of banter which had been theirs; the simple faith which had existed between all three. Coincidence is the handmaid of life. Witness the spin of a coin when love was at stake; the unconcern; the casual and easily gauged speech of the brothers as they decided their order of going . . . remember the facility with which one trips when love and despair join hands.

Since that day Jimmy had been loyal; but now it would be less easy. Joss had intervened and taken Jag to himself; Joss, the god of all sailormen, inscrutable, philosophic, omnipotent. Why had this happened? How came it that Jimmy, who was one of the Death or Glory boys, had not been called? The notion flashed and was gone, for Jimmy Haines was no intro-

spectionist. Jag had paid ; that stood out in all clarity, for his brother had little faith in any other theory. Too many had been flung into the ditch since fighting commenced for those in contact with facts to dally long with hope. Jimmy had seen some of them go. Others he had seen who had survived the ordeal of the open boat. And some he had met bobbing in mid-Channel supported by a lifebelt—naked, bloodless, eyeless—treading water with limbs from which all flesh had peeled. He did not speak of these matters except with his pals. At mess sometimes the phase would crop up and the gamut of horror would run for a while in the form of statements—brief, terse, which no one would question. Their number was up, that is all.

The optimism and beautiful faith of the Rector was a long way distant from his son. One dealt in theories, the other in facts. Jimmy was "up against it," just as were his brothers. They were fighters, men in the front line who knew what they knew and found it terrible.

For these reasons, then, Jimmy refused to talk of the silence which had grown about the missing boats as he walked with Dorothea to call on the Admiral. He told her the C.O. knew more than anyone else and would prefer to deal with it himself. In a joking aside he said it was his perquisite, the only one left to a C.O., and he would like to see what use he made of it. Then at a hazard discussed the Cinderella-men and their wonderful pluck without touching the details of their tragedies.

"Don't blow the gaff on me," he whispered when presently they reached the anteroom, "but remember what I say. If he doesn't turn on the Cinderella tap, it will be the first time in memory he has missed it."

They went in almost at once, and Dorothea made her bow while the Admiral took mental notes of the picture.

"I had a message from Sir Douglas Clancy," he announced, "to tell me you were coming, and the reason——"

"It was very good of him to go to such pains to make my path smooth," Dorothea told him in response.

"Not at all. Had he not done so you would have had some difficulty in getting here," laughed the Admiral.

"In spite of my passes ?"

"Rather because of them." He nodded over this, his eyes noting that Sir Douglas had not drawn on imagination. "You see, there are spies."

"Women?"

"Even women—and they have passes, you may be sure . . . wonderful credentials, too . . . and dresses. So we try to handicap them, as you see, and sometimes we do."

Admiral Sheldon was tall, grey and clean shaven. A man with overhanging brows, aquiline nose and straight lips—a martinet, as Jimmy asserted, and a "dug out."

"They tell me you are interested in the Merchant Service—my Cinderella-men, as I call them."

Jimmy squirmed as he heard. The C.O. was off on his old racket, uncorked, ready to shower praise!

"I wish we could get them in line with the Navy, though," the Admiral concluded.

"Why?"

"Because they are such splendid seamen, Miss Nesbit, in spite of their handicaps."

Dorothea breathed quickly. Her heart leaped at the words; then she glanced at Jimmy and detected a smile which came near to compassion; and that overwhelmed her. She asked softly, "Have you any news of—the *Vulcan*?" and sat there biting her lips, conscious that Jimmy was intolerable.

"Nothing of the boats we are looking for. The trawler that is bringing the survivors has had engine trouble and is delayed as a result. Where are you staying? I must keep in touch with you, you know."

Dorothea told him and rose to leave. The Admiral stood also, and Jimmy put the question which had escaped—"Nothing of my brother, sir?"

"Not a word, Haines. But that does not mean we should give up hope. A dozen factors come into play in these cases . . . we shall hear presently."

"Even now, after eighteen days?" Dorothea pressed.

"Yes, without doubt."

"You give me new life," she whispered. "A little while ago I hardly dared to think . . . now I may."

"My Cinderella-men," he said, with a whimsical glance, "are so splendidly resourceful that I never despair of them."

"You are one of the few who see them as they are," she smiled.

"Of course. My grandfather was in Green's as a boy; my father followed. That is why I am in the Navy."

He accompanied her to the door and stood a moment facing the sea after making this statement, then—

"The Merchant Service requires help," he said. "It has gone down while we, who sprang from its loins, have gone up. Competition with foreigners and with its compeers has undone the future that seemed to be before it. There should be an Agnes Weston to look after the men when they are pitchforked with full pockets into the arms of the Shore Gang . . . perhaps, some day, when the war is done with, an Agnes Weston may arise . . . au revoir."

So Dorothea passed with Jimmy at her side to the gates which shut off the crowd from the Base. A sentry came to attention as they crossed the threshold of his box. He became rigid, his hand slapped on the butt of his rifle until they passed; then turned and stood to look after them.

"Wonders who has been interviewing the Chief," Jimmy commented, noting these signs. "Thinks I'm a lucky beggar, Lady Dorothea, instead of the miserablest blighter in the Service."

"You miserable!" she smiled. "Am I expected to believe that?"

"A mere platitude," he grinned. "Shall we take a cab or walk?"

"Walk." She faced the sea which ran in serried lines of attack.

"We can get tea on the way. It's not far. You aren't tired?" His heart leaped as he watched her.

"Not a bit."

"Come then, walk with me, there's a dear girl . . . it's so jolly lonely away from everything and everybody you know."

"The Padre will be here in a few days," she told him in her matter-of-fact way. "You will be glad of that."

"Gladder to see you, Lady Dorothea. It's ages since I came away from you all."

"When you were called to Whale Island?" she commented.

"Yes, I remember you hadn't time to come up and say good-bye to us."

He watched her sidelong, his heart thumping. Then without noticeable effort he switched off—"That's the worst of being on Service. Never know where you'll be till you jolly well get there. The war wouldn't have stopped short with Fritz up the Thames if I had stayed. Trust the silent Navy! Phit! what do people care—they don't, provided we keep off the Huns."

"Jimmy! You know that isn't true."

"'Pon honour, Lady Dorothea, I never gave it a thought till now."

"Then why now?"

He maintained silence, and she pursued remorselessly, "It's wicked if you apply it generally to the Nation; but if you intend me to understand you are hitting at your friends, it is unjust and unkind."

"Sorry!" he blurted. "Didn't know I could scratch before. . . . Shall have to remember that when next I'm driven into a corner."

"I can't imagine you driven anywhere," Dorothea smiled in spite of herself.

"Can't you? Jove! that shows how much you understand of mere man."

"Jimmy!" She turned on him with some heat.

"My lady of the golden . . ."

"Why are you rotting?" she broke in, angry as he had not seen her for years. "Is my intelligence at fault? Are you afraid I am going to howl because I was fool enough to break down when you met me? Do you suppose Jag's name is not to be mentioned in my presence . . . in spite of the fact that I came down to hear it?" She looked him over, angry at her own anger, noting the flush she had raised. "You are a very good sort," she added, "when you keep sane; but when you rot, you just . . ."

"Put the lid on?" he suggested as she paused. "Right-o! What shall it be?"

"Tell me what your C.O. meant about Agnes Weston?" she asked at once, her own cheeks aflame.

Jimmy whistled—a long, minor note; the call by which he used to announce his presence at Low Willows.

"Afraid I don't know much about it—the fact is it hasn't come my way. She runs Homes, you know, for the bluejackets and black squad at Naval Centres. Gets up concerts, kinema shows, any sort of amusement to keep the men out of harm's way . . . and she does it jolly well too. Self-supporting scheme, I believe. Nothing to do with charity or anything of that sort—as far as I know."

"And she organized it?" Dorothea asked as he paused.

"I believe so. Anyhow, she runs it. Portsmouth is the chief centre. She's a brick, anyhow," he added, with evident sincerity, "and has done no end of good among the mat'loes . . . motherly interest, not grandmotherly, you understand. That's why it goes down."

"But it is for Naval men only?" she questioned.

"Naval ratings—no one else."

"Has the Merchant Service anything of the kind?"

"Not that I know of. There are Sailors' Homes," he said.

"Perhaps they do the same sort of thing. I don't know."

"Poor Jag!" Dorothea breathed. "No wonder he hated it all. Nothing to make men proud of their calling! Isn't it English?"

"Probably. 'Pon honour I haven't thought about it."

"You have, Jimmy—and you hate them," she said quietly.

"Will you tell me why?"

"Hate them? Not I. I haven't the time," he laughed, in spite of her appeal.

"Why?" she insisted.

"Oh, well," he admitted, "perhaps I'm not keen on them. They are bonny fighters, though, and I take off my hat to them; but—well, just consider their discipline and their comic-opera kit—their rotten English, and as for obeying orders they haven't the first notion. Remember *Lusitania* . . . ten miles off the coast, and they call *that* mid-Channel! We told her what was in the way, wirelessly every turn of the game . . . yet she comes blundering along at half-speed, without zigzagging—asking for it, by Jove! for all the world as though she had never heard of a submarine. I can't stick that sort of tomfoolery. I call it stupidity . . . and the *Lucy's* one of their cracks."

"Haven't your men done some rather stupid things too?" she persisted, her pulses throbbing.

"Very likely."

"The *Cressy*, *Aboukir* and *Hogue*," she suggested, "at half-speed while on patrol in the North Sea. One submarine sinks all three. Wasn't that asking for it?"

"They were obeying orders," he said at once. "*Lusitania* was disobeying them. Ours were like the brigade at Balaclava, doing what they were told to do, knowing they would get it in the neck, and that some one had blundered . . . the *Lucie's* weren't."

"Yes," she admitted. "My argument was unfair. I shouldn't have used it; still, I think you should remember that when Jag went out to face his enemies he did so because without the Merchant Service we should starve and the Navy would be useless. Ask Admiral Shelton, Sir Douglas, Sir John Jellicoe . . . your own particular hero, Jacky Fisher—and see what they say. Remember, too, Jag had no guns, the *Lusitania* no guns."

Cinderella-men ! Nothing but their bare fists and such wit as the good God gave them . . . don't forget that."

Jimmy caught the note in her voice and walked afraid ; but she insisted on an answer. " Still sneer at them ? " she asked, her chin lifted to face the breeze as they came round the Point.

" I don't think that fair," he answered her.

" Jealous, then ? "

" Afraid I haven't considered either attitude yet——"

" Fencing," she decided, head tilted to catch him.

" If it will give you happiness, Lady Dorothea, I certainly will."

" No," she announced, closing the door. " On its merits. Now. Otherwise forget I spoke."

He had nothing to say.

CHAPTER IX

WHERE THE SEA ROLLS IN

THE pageant of the sun was dead, but the pageant of a cloudless night remained as the boat which carried Haines and his guard moved slowly towards a small jetty standing straddle-legged at the entrance of the river. The tide flowed with them pushing steadily for high water. Overhead was the canopied arch of the heavens pricked with stars which flung long trails upon the darker sea ; about, on every hand, the pulsing swell bereft of sting, marching to break over there upon the dunes and reedy outworks of the land.

The jetty grew large as they approached. It presently stood over them with monstrous legs spread-eagled to the sea. Slime and grass dipped and slobbered in the swell which surged upon them. Iron ties, red under its touch, played with the grass and refuse they had captured, holding them high in triumph, sousing them with recurrent gestures, ineffably the master. Shell-fish were there, barnacles, clinging to the iron, hissing each time the sea freed them, alight each time it swallowed tie and limpet . . . and, at the side, coming down from an impossible height, a ladder, steep and slimy, dipped with its feet in the sea.

Haines looked out upon this thing and found it empty of novelty. It was the kind of jetty sailors come upon in all parts of the world, a commonplace means of exit and entry for the land which lay beyond ; but, as far as he could read, it would be the last he would see. Over there was a wooden lantern-house, its lamp blinking like a tired child ; beside it a boat swaying in the davits, the band which girt it loose ; beyond, a crane, its engine smothered in a canvas jacket, asleep, tired perhaps from a day's roystering and preparing for to-morrow in the land of to-morrow.

All asleep. No watchman, no coastguard, no lighthouse people. The coast flat beyond the pier and the dunes, the river straddling it crookedly to the hills—if they were hills which hung there shadowed in distance. The boat that carried them seemed to lack those things for which one searches when coming to the home of boats. The place was as deserted as the coast-line of Zafarana and the mountains of Sinai, a fact which slowly made way in Haines' brain.

He was in irons and still, as is the way with sailors in boats at sea. There was no need for the rope which was about his middle, no need for the guard who sat on the bottom-board holding the rope with a double turn about the next thwart ; but,

in spite of that, or perhaps because of it, those who sat in the stern-sheets were constant in their attentions. Their object was to peg out a live man, not a corpse. There was no fun to be got out of watching the dead drown; besides, was this not to be one of the frolics of this *frisch fröhliche Krieg* about which they might babble when it was over?

Haines stared into the night searching for one of those chances which had thronged when he stood in the Control; but as they drew near and he became aware of their isolation his heart throbbed to a new tune. There came a tightening, a sudden flutter which was strange. To be pegged out for the tide to smother, without a fight or any chance of it, is not the end any man willingly approaches; yet, now that he faced it, Haines would not have withdrawn the gibe which placed him in the boat. But for that gibe he might already be dead, one of the *verschollen* he had heard so discussed on the submarine. As it was he still lived, breathed and found something in the still solemnity of the shore they approached, something in the deep magic of the violet night which enwrapped them, he would not have missed before he moved hence.

The gruff voice of Triune Majesty advised him of the trend of events. They lay beside the ladder and must climb it in order to see the stars which now were hidden. Haines rose at the word and mounted, a guard on either hand attending him, one behind him ready with fixed bayonet to administer what is known as persuasion. They emerged upon the jetty, Herr Doctor gave the word and they marched. Authority sat ill on the shoulders of this officer. He made up for his shortness and rotundity by a sternness which mocked at dignity. So with the pistol he carried. It was an automatic which he contrived to advertise at each movement of his arm or leg. Haines watched, fascinated. He marched so near it was possible perhaps to seize it, turn it on his guard and get the thing done . . . then, to his astonishment, the doctor came close to him and growled out—

“Keep gool,” as though he intended the guard should understand he threatened. “I carry out my orders . . . but I come back before ze tide reach you.”

He spoke in a low and surly monotone, stalking ruffled beside Haines.

“We haaf drouble presently,” he vouchsafed, plodding in the sand. “Zese men make mutiny, as I told you zey would. I

belief zey not go on board again—zen zere will be ze devil to pay . . . you onderstan' ? ”

Haines walked with growing hope. He began to see chances even now. He replied that the thing was plain, and the doctor meandered of his complex difficulties.

“ Our boat,” he pointed to the submarine here, “ is damaged by zat dess-charge, but Nekker say 'ee dake 'er 'ome. 'Ee refuse to go into port for rebairs . . . 'ee sink it likely 'ee get inderned, but ze crew is avvraid of zair life if zey go out . . . so—zat mean drouble.”

They passed from the jetty and wheeled by the right for the dunes, five men of the crew, two of them carrying stakes, hammers and rope, three of them armed in charge of their captive, and all instantly boggled in their stride. The sand was loose, wind-blown and uneven, tufted with sedge and weed. The men tripped in it, but pushed on curving towards the slope where the sea rolled in. It lapped solemnly under the stars, breaking with a thin curl of iridescent fire down there where the sand thrust out shoulders to stay it. They crossed a line of weed and the debris of a town far up the bight ; then came upon wet sand, firm to their tread. Here the doctor halted them and, after a minute examination of the ground, twisted and marched slowly seaward, measuring with long strides.

Haines watched him go. He felt less at ease now that he was alone with the guard. The men were talking in low gutturals he could not understand, words which growled out their view possibly of the U-boat service, possibly with reference to Haines. It was, perhaps, an opportunity to wrench free and make a run for it ; his heart leaped . . . but on glancing round he saw that the guard who stood behind with fixed bayonet at the ready would interrupt that. It would be the end. He had no doubt on that score. It would be suicide—and again he decided that suicide was not his *métier*.

Nor was he shaken from this attitude when presently he descried a light, far off, twinkling like the higher stars, and knew that at length the solitude which had so burdened him contained others who might give aid. Obviously his position was one in which patience was the stronger rôle ; but a man faced by such conditions could not be sure he would play it. A sudden rush might be effectual . . . on the other hand, it might not. Cold steel has a restraining effect which is undeniable. It is the ghastliest of all modes of quittance, and Haines was aware of it.

He stood drumming with his feet to stare after that distant personage who ordered events. He saw him waiting at the edge of the sea, gauging its flow. Watched him run back quickly as a swell rolled in, and smiled at the precision of his return, again measuring with absurd strides the distance it lay from the group who awaited him. Methodical! Haines smiled more broadly, even in such circumstances as these. No—he could not trust him. The man remained illusive, a person Haines could not gauge in spite of the desire to trust which seems to be the birthright of men of the British race. He watched still, and presently saw Authority halted, twisting with his heel in the sand and heard the order he gave to advance.

The guard with the fixed bayonet brought its tip nearer, pricking him and re-echoing the command. "Marsh!" he shouted, "Eenglish *schwein*!" And instantly Haines had forgotten the bayonet, wrenched free and struck with his manacled hands.

The man fell like a stuck bullock, and the others closed in shouting, gesticulating, crowding upon a prisoner who could not run, clubbing him.

That might easily have been the end. That it was not was due to the doctor, whose voice came down the breeze ordering his men to halt. Then he appeared among them, automatic pistol at the ready, demanding the meaning of this *verdammt* turmoil in a voice that panted.

"He called me an English *schwein*," Haines shouted back. "What can you expect?"

"Joust what you do."

He turned on his men, his voice grating harshly as he lashed them.

"The first man who plays with an authority which is mine," he said in German, "I shoot. The second I take on board and he is flogged first and shot afterwards. If that is not sufficient, there are those who will provide triangles at the base. By your left, twelve paces—March!"

They marched as before, Haines in the centre, and came to the doctor's position, halted and got to work. The man Haines had struck remained where he fell, the others were cowed. Down Haines' left thigh blood trickled. He stood there recognizing that for a moment he had failed to keep cool in a situation which demanded silence and the indifference of a deaf mute.

The doctor fussed about giving instructions and plainly annoyed. He grumbled at the inadequacy of his detail. There

should have been a petty officer to assist him in carrying out the work ; but none came. He cursed the fact that his feet were wet, and damned because the rope which they had brought was wet also and smothered with sand. . . . " In Belgium," he said finally, with a snap at Haines, " I haff seen men grucified wiz lances . . . women run through—skewered"—he called it "sguered"—"for less zan wot you do . . . but we haff no lances and moust use rope. I hope it make you happy, zat. It is of itself a consideration in your favour—no ? "

He broke off to belabour with German the fool-man who was driving stakes. He pictured him in a small hell of his own, compelled always to drive stakes to keep back the fire which swept in upon him from a broken hose, while the Devil laughed and sprayed him with oil.

"Get it done ! " he ordered, "without talk, or you and I will have drouble. Straighten your back ! Hit as though you mean it ! "

The phrases suited his rasping utterance. The guttural twist he put into them showed a man plainly on edge as his slow English never did. It seemed to Haines that he challenged them, that he would drive his men to play their hand there, where it was possible Haines might aid him, rather than on the jetty where he must face them alone. But Haines, in spite of this byplay which in other conditions would have been interesting, was concerned with the position he faced, and critical even of himself.

He grew hot and cold in turn. He discovered a curious reluctance to indulge in talk. It would have been easier, he argued, to have leapt from the boat or from the jetty than to lie extended, a prey to babbling wavelets. True, the doctor promised to return ; but was he to be trusted ? Could one ever trust a German ? In the old days it was nearly impossible, now it was unthinkable. Suppose all this talk and brandishing of pistols was but a means of gaining his end ? Suppose——

Suddenly he found himself putting the thing in words which plainly questioned the good faith of Triune Majesty, glum at his side.

"You promised if I kept quiet once before, that you would give me an opportunity to meet Nekker . . . but it did not come off. How can I trust you ? "

"Drust ? *Hollsch !* You must. Zair is nussing elze you can do. Look ! " He pointed to the guard standing behind him with bayonet pointed to strike.

"A man can but die once," Haines flung back, "and I might be able to take some one with me."

"Drue. Zat is so—yet I do not sink you will."

"Why did you get Nekker out of my way?" Haines raged.

"Because Nekker vool me. 'Ee go ashore before I know any-sing. 'Ee give me zese men to do ziss work 'oo are mutineers. *Ach!* Nekker andt me bresently haff big aggount to get settle. Is zat not blain?"

"God knows."

"Andt I know. *Zut!* You sink of zat 'scrap of paper' broposition . . . it comes into play always now . . . Sdill—ze sdakes are ready and ze rope, stiff and stupid wiz sand, is ready too. Come, I make you fast wiz my own 'ands . . . and if I no come to ontie zem you will berhaps find uzzers 'oo will. I know. . . . Lie down!"

"Suppose I refuse?"

"Zen, I sorry, but I shoot you." He raised his pistol. "Better dake ze chance. Zere is always somesing bossible for ze man 'oo 'as life . . ."

Haines stood irresolute—but at a word from Authority a man gripped him on either side and flung him while those who had prepared the stakes sat upon him and kept him still.

On the whole, Haines considered it wise to offer no resistance. It seemed easier at that moment to trust rather to the sea he knew than to the bayonet he did not know.

He remained quiescent, breathing heavily. The doctor unlocked his handcuffs and stretched him out—spreadeagled him, as the phrase goes. The men moved off going towards the pier.

With a swift movement Herr Doktor stooped over him, seized his left arm and said in his ear:

"In caze I not able to gome back I giff you ziss . . ."

Haines was conscious as he took this in of a sudden sting, a sharp stab, as of a needle dug forcibly into his arm, and drew back with a quick muscular contraction. But he was pegged out, he could not withdraw, and simultaneously the doctor's grip tightened so that he was helpless. He growled out, angry at this addition to his torture:

"What the devil are you up to now? If you do come back and I get free, God help you, or Nekker . . ."

Then suddenly he found his arm released and strove to look round. As he twisted he caught sight of a rotund figure following

in the wake of his men and pictured him chuckling over the success of his scheme. He had won without a struggle. It was no corpse that would lie waiting the tide, but a man, alive, beautifully instinct with feeling; beautifully instinct with hope—and there, beyond Triune Majesty, Haines could see something which made his pulses leap again, which bade him shout even now while the shadow of his captor was before him.

It was the light he had discovered before, nearer now, but still far off. It blinked on the rim of his world like the gleam of a masthead light picked up in the tropics, so low on the horizon that sometimes the sea blotted it out. He had no longer any desire to call. While those men were still near, it might spell disaster. Who can fathom the workings of the German mind? Not Haines, the straight and rather simple Englishman caught in its toils.

He resumed his first attitude, stark upon his back facing the stars. He found the posture into which he had twisted impossible to maintain. It would produce cramp, a ricked neck, put his shoulder out of joint—yet he longed to follow with his eyes the movement of that light. With a stifled groan he lay straight, then, exerting all his strength, wrenched at the stake which held his left wrist. He might, with equal effect, have pulled at the piles of the jetty over there where they had landed. His arm smarted horribly after that effort. For a moment it seemed blood trickled from it, and he imagined a slit artery as the last gift of Herr Doktor. Perhaps he wronged him. He could not say. He strove to reach over and touch the wound, such as it was, with his tongue, to test it, to discover its position, whether life ebbed . . . but that, too, only produced an aching of the muscles which would end in cramp. He could not reach. He was like a tired swimmer who spies a rope dangling from the rail of some anchored craft and on coming to it finds it out of reach. So it would go on, he argued, until the end.

In an access of wrath he dragged at the fastenings which held him, testing them one by one, both feet, both arms, and lay back exhausted. He had been unable to loosen either. He ached with the effort he had made, that is all.

He remained a long while after this in perfect quiet, husbanding his strength, watching the stars and analysing the indications which came from his hurts. The gash in his back throbbed now that he was compelled to lie on it. He knew it was a mere flesh wound, a prod; but he could not gauge its depth. He knew that

his arm bothered him, that something sharp had been stuck into it, perhaps a hypodermic syringe with its load of deadliness, and that was the end of his knowledge. Imagination playing with the unknown grew as he dwelt on these matters. Long before the doctor could return, if he intended to do so, or that stranger who approached swinging a lamp could reach him, he would be bled white. And with this came an echo of the old vaunt—"Well, a man can but die once."

True ! But it does not predicate peace for the man compelled to wait for death that he should lie still as an empty bottle waiting for the tide to fill it. It does not predicate that it will be easy to lie inert, watching the end draw near. There came into Haines' mind a memory of the executioner clock of Strassburg, and he saw the man's head thrust through the dial, waiting the sword hand's approach, felt the agony of the first small pressure as the thing ticked out its message of death . . .

To die fighting is the supreme ideal of a virile man. He faces his enemy while he can stand. He does not contemplate death, but victory. All his force is given to victory, all his thoughts. Death does not present itself. It is banished by the swift turns of the encounter. The brain conspires to blind him, it glozes hurts, hides failure, blots out time. He is the centre of a vast system which must end in victory . . . he is alert with it, nimble, ready to confound his adversary. . . .

But this stillborn hatchment of a devil's brooding left a man no opportunity for action, no work for the brain to order, no use for muscles ; strength a drug . . . nothing under the stars but patience which might end in slobbering gasps for breath ; or the mazed quiescence of one who has lost touch with thought, forgotten hope, and lies with lips twisted in a grin, mouthing at the infinite.

He became drowsy. Space dwindled and closed down upon him. He had a notion of being smothered, and fought for breath, and as he fought his heavy eyelids closed ; but he did not sleep. For minutes together his brain reeled, faces came near, bending over him, some in pity, some in scorn. Lassitude followed in the path of this. Perhaps he dreamed. He could not tell whether he dreamed or saw . . . Then from somewhere in space came the crack of a rifle, followed almost instantly by several shots in rapid succession. That woke him and he strove to pierce the distance, but could find no sign. Again there was silence vibrant

with the throb of approaching wavelets . . . far off, far off, on the confines of the world ; like the drum of a surf when the sea is tired, hollow, resonant—soothing as a lullaby.

How long this continued Haines could not have said. His mind was intent on fighting sleep until the sea drew near and put sleep out of court. It curled now with a persistent lapping close at hand. Each time it approached his muscles stiffened in the effort to drag from contact. And for a time, it seemed, his strength sufficed. He appeared to have evaded it and began to wonder whether the tide would reach him at all . . . whether, in point of fact, the doctor had so planned his bed that he could not drown. He raised his head, struggling to discover whether he lay on the flat or on one of the higher banks of sand ; but he could not see. The line of iridescent breakers, small and of inconceivable malignity, approached ; babbled of their march, of their might ; flung spray and debris, drew back. Nothing else appeared. Then quite suddenly the water reached him in spite of his swift muscular withdrawal ; flowed to his knees and left him thrilling as from amputation.

He fought now as he had not before. He threw all his weight on the stake which held his right arm. The water had run in on that side forming a small lagoon. Haines watched it grow in size and depth. It seemed possible that its advent would enable him to loosen the stake. Sand becomes alive with a flowing tide. Deep down the water percolates, pushing through the strata, saturating it and producing what in other conditions are quicksands.

Again the sea flowed over him reaching to his armpits, and he exchanged his method of attack, thrusting upon the stake which just now he had pulled. It moved.

With a sudden flush of triumph Haines reversed the action as the water gurgled back leaving him dry. Again it moved. He was certain of this and set to work methodically to wriggle it free. By the time the next roller invaded him he had so loosened the stake that he could twist it in one arc of a circle. He strove to lift with each effort, singing aloud in his triumph ; but nothing came of it, and the next roller spluttered over him to his chin. His song died. Triune Majesty had done his work well. Haines was wet to the eyes, gasping from that last effort, the stake apparently sunk in clay. The spray sizzled in white splotches above his head. He was alive and crammed with ideas, all pointing to the method he must employ. He must lift the damned

thing . . . Yes—that was it. He gave it a small sweeping circular motion and strove to make with his elbow a fulcrum of the sands which should enable him to lift as well as sway.

Rigid in attitude, tense, each muscle strained ; spread-eagled and stark upon his back, he was unable to do this thing. He could not obtain the necessary leverage. The tide was mastering him. The red blood surged to his brain and he sank back exhausted as the sea rolled in.

It covered him now, flowed over him and came trickling back in little rills which seemed to mock at his impotence to stay them. It was dark, the sands shadowed by night ; only the stars alive and watching. Haines sent out a cry for help as the tide sank away from him, and the sea laughed, clubbing its waters with those which rolled back spent. It came in with a note of insolence, hollow, impersonal, majestic.

Haines heard it and strove to lift his head. He shouted aloud in his agony, and the shout died in a long gurgling sound as the sea rolled in . . .

In the near distance was a light. Haines did not see it. For some time it had approached, but now it came forward with a run, swung by the hand of a man in the uniform of the German Navy. A tall, thick-necked, rather flabby personage this : one who could speak English nearly as well as his mother tongue. He came close and threw the light on Haines' face, calling out—

“By God ! You were right. . . . What in the world was that *verflucht Doktor* thinking about ? ”

He lifted Haines' head, staring with his eyes, holding the lamp over him, and again raised his voice, shouting—

“Quick ! Help me cut him adrift or it will be too late.” He spoke German here, the German which addresses superiors and would explain stupid evidences. “Lucky he blurted out what happened . . . but what made him do it is to me incomprehensible.”

It was Von Nekker who shouted, kneeling on the sands beside Haines and working feverishly to get him raised before the tide again flowed in.

“The man must have been mad,” said a companion voice speaking German with the inflection of Spain. “If this sort of thing gets into the papers it is bad for the Fatherland.”

“*Quos deus vult perdere,*” another rolled out, “*brius dementat.*”

They stooped over Haines, lifting his head as the tide came twisting to slay him.

CHAPTER X

THE MAN WAS MAD

FOUR strangers helped Haines to reach the jetty and persuaded Von Nekker to bow before laws which have opportunism for their scaffolding. Incidentally they saved Haines' life.

They made it quite clear that the symbolism of the Cross was out of place on the clean sands of Torre del Fuero and that it would be unwise to continue it as one of the punishments to be administered by U-boat commanders. Authority would deal sternly with any recurrence of it. It was unthinkable here—they emphasized the adverb. In protesting gutturals they gave it as their opinion that if the doctor had acted on his own initiative, then unquestionably he was mad. Consider, they urged, the risk of discovery. Was it wise to provide further argument for those who were already obsessed by the stupidly strung evidence which had already been piled up, sifted, patched and printed in the indictment against Germany?

"Sink and leave no trace" was sane and splendid in comparison with this *verdamnt* stupidity. In the open sea it was possible to secure the co-operation of Nature; but here one was confronted with the elemental fact that to-morrow the prisoner would have been found, pegged out, dead, by the first group of fishermen who passed. . . . They were Spaniards, every soul of them; people versed in the art of building mountains of verbiage about incidents in themselves quite simple.

These fisher-folk hated Germany. They refused to forget they were the brothers of those Spanish sailors who, unfortunately, had lost their lives in conflict with the U-boats. They argued that the thing was done with the connivance of the Cortes, and Ministers went openly in fear of their threats. It was only by the lavish use of German gold that any consideration could be obtained; only by constant watchfulness and an expenditure which was colossal.

The grumbling colloquialisms with which they wrapped their speech often passed Haines' ears without leaving any impression beyond a tingling; but when they descended to statements of fact he was swift to pounce and piece them to other facts already gleaned. Nekker, too, was glum. He was subdued in a fashion Haines had never considered likely. He was no longer the cock-a-hoop personage before whom all men must bow; but one of those who bowed. It was easy to deduce from all this that his com-

panions were men in authority. Haines visualized them as of the Embassy in Madrid—Agents, in any case, who had no mind to permit stupidities in the neighbourhood of the tanks which supplied oil to thirsty U-boats from the Atlantic.

They came presently to the boarded roadway of the jetty and turned to walk towards the boat.

It had seemed possible as they floundered through the sand that these men of the Embassy, if that guess were correct, would take upon themselves the burden of Haines' custody ; but now he knew his fate would still be in Nekker's keeping. He desired to be free of the U-boat and a skipper in whom he had no confidence. The simmering existence entailed, whether prisoner or unfettered, was one which did not appeal to him. He preferred at that moment the alternative of internment, and suddenly stood still. He was weak from his fight on the sands, wet to the skin and more shaky than he had supposed. His knees gave as he walked. He was unable to resist—yet he decided the thing must be tackled now. He looked at his captors and said in the matter-of-fact phrase of one addressing strangers :

"Do either of you speak English ?"

A heavy man of the German type met this with the unconcern of his nation : "*Ja* !—yes, what of that ?"

"I do not wish to return to the submarine," Haines answered. "I wish to be handed over to the Spanish Authorities for internment."

"*Ach* ! that cannot be," said the big German who seemed to be Chief.

"Nevertheless I beg you to consider it."

"You are prisoner of the Captain—not of us who are merely civilians," he shrugged it out, "and without the necessary authority to intervene. Why you anxious to remain here ? What do you fear ?"

"Perhaps *spurlos versenkt*," Haines tossed back at a hazard. "Who can say ?"

"You speak German—you ?"

"I understand it better than I speak," Haines admitted.

"So—then you have understood our conversation ?"

"In part. *Spurlos versenkt* is no riddle in a U-boat."

"Ha—so !" commented the Chief.

The others grunted in corroboration or denial, Haines could not have said which, and the big man who had spoken turned aside to consult Nekker.

At this, the three who had helped Haines so far closed in, and one drew from beneath his cloak an automatic pistol. He had the air of a brigand in musical comedy, a moustache that bristled, a slouch hat of the sombrero type.

"It will be better for you," he said in perfect English, "to accept the position which no doubt you have earned."

"I agree," Haines admitted, "that it would be unwise for an unarmed and wounded man to attempt to fight—unless he is tired of life."

"And you . . . how does that apply ?"

"I am content with things as they are. If you will put a curb on your genial Commander, make him comprehend that civilized nations do not torture prisoners, I would as soon take my chance in a U-boat as in a Spanish prison."

"So—that is reasonable . . . but you say you are wounded—how ?"

"Bayonet stab—nothing much, but it is getting stiff."

"We will give instructions concerning that. Have no fear, Captain ; Herr Kommandant will carry out the orders we decide to give him. Indeed, for some reason, I think you will find him grateful. I do not know why, but so he expressed it."

"Grateful ?"

"So it appears."

The suggestion was so dim that Haines failed to pierce it. In gauging the mentality of Von Nekker and his countrymen, he was aware that it was essential to tread softly. He was aware, too, that so far Nekker had come off second best, as he put it, in the struggle. But it was complicated, involved. There was that absurd podginess, the doctor, who had crucified him "without orders," to consider ; the fact that the crew had threatened mutiny ; the "nerf-weariness" of Von Nekker ; the strained condition of the U-boat lying out there guzzling oil for her homeward trip. But, on the other hand, Haines had come to the decision that if his protest ensured him a safe conduct from Nekker, then he would take his chance at sea rather than in one of the fever-haunted prisons of Spain.

The sea would bring him nearer home, nearer the naval screen with its patrols, motor-boats and racing T.B.D.'s. His pulses thrilled at the thought. . . . Again he tasted the joys of freedom . . . any accident might bring it. . . . He would trust to that.

The Chief came back from his consultation and announced with the intonation of one delivering judgment :

"As I tell you joust now, we haff—ah—no jurisdiction in ziss matter. You are prisoner of war to Germany and the Kommandant is responsible for your—ah—safe delivery," he put it so, "at Naval headquarters. I imagine zat is onderstood—no?"

"At least give me a change of clothes," Haines begged.

"On board you will obtain that."

Nekker came near at this, speaking rapidly. It was easy to see he was still suffering from his recent experience of British depth-charges, and he now asserted that it was unsafe to proceed farther with the U-59. He urged that the Spanish authorities should intern both ship and crew. He had no officers. His men were scared. He poured out a stream of reasons why it would be better for him to take his boat round to Cadiz and get her interned; but his overlords would hear nothing of this. They tried persuasion, all talking together, amazingly out of hand, failed and fell back on orders which were definite.

"You will go away to sea," said he who was Chief. "You will go at once. You will report your movements to the base as hitherto. When you have gone I shall communicate with Headquarters telling them to look for you, and I shall destroy this base. For high political considerations it has become essential to give it up. When your boat has charged her tanks and gone away, the apparatus will be cut off, buoys removed—there will be no Torre del Fuero again. *Caramba!* Zat at all events is plain—no?"

Nekker could make no headway here. He walked on clay and had the handicap of slipperiness; but words poured in a torrent, swift, guttural, ending with an *Ach!* and a salute, rigid, restrained as he twisted to move down the pier.

Haines remained with his overlords, considering the end. And to him came the voice of the Chief, mellow again, burning to remove an impression.

"You will onderstand," he explained, "zat we were unaware of the existence of ziss base. We are concerned—it is important you should recognize zis—that it should have been placed here, apparently in collusion wiz ourselves who are of ze Imperial German Service. By whom it was instituted we cannot say, but we have assured the Spanish Government of our entire innocence and we have determined to destroy it—*heïn?*

"You, sir, Captain, are an Englishman, a countryman of those who are busy destroying with zair propaganda the good name of Germany. So! Perhaps you will also bear witness, when you

return to your country, zat zere are still men of honour amongst Germans, men who know how to behave as gentlemen even when zair is a world-war on zair shoulders—no ? ”

“ We recognize, sir, exactly what is set before us by our enemies,” Haines castanetted through teeth that refused obedience. “ I am fresh from some of these experiences and am ready to make due acknowledgment.”

“ Not very effective—zat ? ”

“ At the moment it is the best I can do.”

The Germans stood portentously over him. “ You suggest zere is somesing behind . . . is zat it ? ”

“ Who am I,” Haines chattered, “ that I should play with words ? I am cold to the bone, aching, and none too well pleased . . . ”

“ *Ach!*—so ? ”

“ *Exactamente, señor.* ”

“ Zen you had better get on board wiz Von Nekker an’ find a change of close,” came gruffly upon the softer Spanish.

He addressed the brigand who carried an automatic :

“ See him to the boat and if he resists, shoot . . . *Hasta luego, señor.* You haff your instructions. Go ! ”

CHAPTER XI

ET PUIS ?

LIGHTS grew out of the haze as they approached the end of the pier. A group of men were at work near the head of the steps. The lamps moved in a curtain, blurred, yellow, like fog, while the men seemed to be engaged in scrubbing decks. One, leaning over the rail, drew water from the river which still moved sluggishly to high tide, and Haines caught the swish of it as it was dashed upon the planks. Brooms came into play as they passed on—the noise made was unmistakable, to a sailor. A voice challenged, guttural—hateful.

"Halt ! Who comes ?"

"X. W. L.," said Nekker, with the German click.

"Advance, X. W. L., and give the countersign."

Nekker moved forward, a word on his lips which sounded like "Hell," and Haines saw the gleam of a rifle as a sentry came to the salute.

Nekker pushed on, Haines at his side. He came to a petty officer standing near the head of the steps and said :

"Not yet finished this damned mess ? Make them move . . . where is the boat ?"

"At the steps, Kommandant."

"Let her get ready. And you, with your gang, get back to your company." He turned to Haines. "Now we go off," he said in English. "Stop that *verdammt* water-throwing !" Again the German leaped rasping in his throat. "What if there are stains ? Tell them it is rust. . . ." He turned towards Haines, his face stuck out in the mist. "Now, sir, Captain—I wait for you to go first. No tricks, or I lose patience and shoot. I am tired of this fool play with men who know nothing, nothing, as God is above, of the difficulties I face . . . and," he added inconsequently, "I am thirsty as never before in my life. . . ."

He flourished his pistol at the correct moment and carried it at the ready. Haines was unarmed, Nekker exceedingly alert. He chuckled, pressing forward.

One behind the other the two men moved down the steps and climbed into the boat. It was the craft in which Haines and the doctor had come ashore, manned by three Spaniards, mute but swift to obey. Apparently it was part of the base establishment which the Embassy had condemned ; the place where U-boats crept in when short of oil, and now had become a matter of dispute between Spain and the Allies. The Germans

were going to wreck it . . . ? Perhaps. It is so easy to make an end of a thing if you have determined where next to set it up.

On these matters Nekker had nothing to say. He was concerned as they moved swiftly downstream with the fact that he had been unable to find the assistance he required. The personal equation loomed large. In a growling monotone he confided to Haines that he was without officers, a plaint which had appeared before ; that the Count who had accompanied him could have dispensed with one or two of his quite useless attachés. It would have done them good to smell the Diessel-thrown-off stench for a month ; taken the curl from their moustaches and made them look, by James ! like barbers' assistants ! " All that lot," he decided, puffing at a cigarette, " are war-shy. They had not conscience which could be worked like those who refused duty in England . . . not that ; but an equally convenient power. They were what the English sailor would call Kaiser-wallahs . . . men with a string to pull . . .

" Piff ! " He flung his cigarette into the mist, " I am sick—sick of the whole business." A gull rose and flapped with his wings upon the sea. It rose giving out the cry of gulls, mournful, monotonous. . . . " When I reach home," Nekker explained, disdainful of interruption, " I shall exchange into surface craft—destroyer, battleship, cruiser . . . anysing they give me where I can breathe and see the . . . "

He paused, twisted his head and, leaning out, said, " That is strange . . . *das ist fehr* . . . " Then, in swift command to the men, "*Alto ahi* . . . *alto* ! "

The boatmen ceased pulling, and the sweep wielded by Von Nekker brought the boat's head round.

Haines stared. Nekker was standing up pointing. " My cigarette ! " he jerked out, " what I throw away, burns still, look . . . on the water. Strange ! . . . "

" Fallen on something," Haines suggested, struck by the man's swift lapse, his stuttering haste.

Suddenly the boat butted, the rowlocks jingled, the spare oar, mast and grapple in the bows grumbled in their places ; lurched and lay still ; then something swept across the bow and trailed alongside.

" *Was ist ?* " Again came the whispered phrase indicative of strain as Nekker leaned over the gunwale striving to read his riddle. One of the sailors moved an oar and the thing rolled over,

Nekker switched on his torch, and Haines saw the body of the doctor inert upon the small swell.

"*Dios!*" It was the Spaniard who found this.

"Hell!" Von Nekker.

He stared as the corpse swayed alongside, inert, lolling in phosphorescent flame. The light died. Beads of fire trailed in small spirals past the boat. With a great show of concern Nekker cried out:

"Some poor devil drowned—and my cigarette fall on him . . . curious! Give way . . . row!" He addressed the boatmen here, but Haines had seen, as the torch flashed, the face of the dead with a small dark hole in the centre of the forehead, blue upon the florid skin. The face of a man shot through the brain and afterwards tossed overboard. That, then, was the reason Herr Doktor had failed to redeem his promise.

The Kommandant was busy covering the trail when Haines gathered he was again speaking:

"This war is productive of much that otherwise would remain undone. I wonder where he comes from, why he died, who were his friends, enemies?" He spoke in a new key, soft, suggestive of puzzle. "I thought I caught sight of shoulder-straps, something like our own of the undersea-service," he went on. "Did you observe that, I wonder?"

Haines decided at once that it would be unwise to acknowledge how much or how little he had seen. He laid stress on the fact that it was dark, the sudden flash of the torch unexpected.

Nekker sighed, found another cigarette, lighted it and sat back, nursing his knee. Again he complained of that fool Count whom he had left ashore heavy with sleep and the good things of this world; a man who might by putting out his finger have relieved the strain which was upon Von Nekker. He said he was afraid to act, that he had no resolution, that a man like Bernstorff was the man for his money—fearless, absolutely fearless; Germany and the German people the one supreme thought. A man like that was able to alter the whole aspect of this war. We were at stalemate because of stupidities at home who refused to do what was essential if Germany was to win . . . he sometimes wondered whether it was not all a plot, a put-up job, by James! to reshuffle the pack, get rid of useless lives and the Socialists together. . . . *Ach!* he was weary of the whole business—so, too, were the sailors. The High Seas Fleet! He jeered at this. "Why, it is even now mutinous, ready to throw up the sponge . . . And

who could wonder when you remember that it is locked up, tied to the Kiel Canal and only dare take exercise in the waters of the Baltic ? And why ? ”

He leaned forward, impressive, filled with portent, smashing at an unoffending hand with clenched fist.

“ Because we have too much science and too little initiative . . . because when this war started, and we of the High Seas Fleet were strong as you—yes, sir, as you—we refused to come out and meet you . . . played about with raids and little pin-pricks when we might have smashed your Grand Fleet, as you call it, at Scapa, landed straight at the heart of your world and torn it from you. That was our strategy—but we were afraid of it . . .

“ That was our game and you knew it. If we had Englishmen in command of our fleets we should have done it. One big adventure—and the end for you . . . so I see it, and have for more days than I live in future. . . . Instead we play about in the Kiel Canal, make speeches about sweeping the seas, and sit down to let the U-boats do the fighting. *Ach !* I am sick . . . sick . . . and to-morrow we all be sick together . . . ”

Haines was quiet under this infliction. The man had so many burdens and such a naïf way of throwing them off, that it all seemed ludicrous, infantile to one who could read some distance behind the lines. He recognized the danger that lurked in all these extravagances, his own position as a prisoner, Nekker's isolation and reliance on him, and the antithesis, as seen in England.

The picture held up for the British people to assimilate showed, as he remembered, a System, monstrous, and soul-enveloping, drawn from an iron discipline and control which was absolute. Germany could do this, Germany could do that—entirely and solely because of her wonderful System, her machine-like processes, her splendid weapons. The High Seas Fleet was secure behind the banks and fortifications of the Frisian Islands. It lay there ready to pounce. At the right moment, after consultation with the powers of earth and sea and Heaven, it came out, did what it intended to do, came back ! A Machine in being !

The U-boats moved by the same law, inspired by a master magician who knew nothing of the personal equation or any ruffling theory ; Mind ruled—the super-mind drawn by Nietzsche. There was no guesswork. It was all plotted and laid out in definite plan. The U-boats went to sea, they moved as they were ordered.

They talked with Berlin when they chose. There was nothing they could not do. Cold, strong, impervious to hardship were the men who manned them. They had no nerves. Some of their Junker Kommandants rose to the pinnacle of fame. In the diction of the day, they were It.

And here Haines moved in the company of these men, heard stories of the abattoirs, the carousals and beastlinesses, all held out by the Master mind as sops to keep his victims from mutiny. A short life and a gay one, women and wine the foils—that was the ideal . . . the other side, you perceive—as enunciated by the nerve-wrung man in command.

Silence on the sea. A cold mist. Oars dripping beads of fire. The Spanish sailors tugging at their sweeps, the boat gradually nearing that sinister and fish-like structure which was to carry Haines and the rest to further adventures—perhaps to the end. One could not foresee what was in store. Haines did not attempt it. The future might be big or it might be little. . . . With a man so obsessed as Nekker, it could scarcely be anything but trivial, a childish mode of facing what came.

And behind them, still in the estuary of the river, the cold body of the one man who had befriended Haines twisted idly amidst the eddies—a floating island carrying gulls to the sea.

1916

BOOK IV

THE HUNTERS

“The Gods alone preserve our Empire; for we on our part are doing all we can to destroy it.”—DEMOSTHENES.

CHAPTER I

FENCING

DOROTHEA was taking tea "by her lonesome," as she would have said, which is, as one may explain, without Jimmy.

For two days he had not been near, nor had she seen him when going to and fro the Base. Perhaps he was afloat—his job was with the Duty Squad—and one never knew when he was in or out, unless . . . Dorothea switched off at a tangent. It was a new world ; secretive, crammed with tragedy.

Effie had enlarged on this theme in a letter which reached the girl since she came to Falmouth. She had been in Copenhagen seeing things, she did not say what. Whatever they were, they seemed to suggest that the war would go on indefinitely, and by way of enlightenment she had asked Dorothea to see Sir Douglas and ask his view. He might explain ; Effie could not. And now she was in Paris, "striving to pierce the veil," and that obviously referred to Alan Wassiter, who was or was not behind the scenes.

Staring through windows frosted with salt, Dorothea visualized again *Punch's* cartoon of the fat German dancing and hilarious over England's generosity in providing the Fatherland with "the sinews of war." Again, looking about, she became aware of the brass hats and gorget patches existing near—all taking tea, smoking cigarettes, as though they too were bitten by the slow procession of incident, now that stalemate had become the order of the day.

But these things did not affect Jimmy. She switched back to that with the unyielding purpose of a mind in despair. She remembered, too, that when she challenged him he told her he must get away to see about replacing some gadgets which had been knocked out in the scrap. Possibly he was nettled. She had pressed him hard. Still, he was Jag's brother and for long years they all had been pals. Jimmy was not easy to read. He was the reverse of Jag in that, also. He had the gift of inscrutability and could shut himself off for hours—days, she corrected, her mind occupied with the past.

The lounge hummed with talk and the jingle of crockery. It was growing dark and the wind drove white horses upon the rocks. Jimmy had lately come back from a bout with it ; Jag remained out there fighting. She was jealous for Jag and Jag's men, and suddenly Jimmy's criticism dinned in her ear—"their comic-opera kit and their rotten English . . . you should just see them

lower a boat!" Ungenerous! No—on consideration she had not been too harsh.

Servants entered to remove the trays. The lounge was nearly empty. Two or three elderly women sat knitting with the industry of old France. They seemed to be unconscious of her presence—which was scarcely true. Then, to trouble her came Jimmy's plaint, "I'm the miserablest blighter in the Service!" Why? It pestered, and she rose to go out.

In the vestibule she met Admiral Sheldon entering in quest of tea. He halted at once. "Not going for a walk, Miss Nesbit?" he asked.

"I must. I have the blues," she told him.

"Um! But what are you going to do?"

"I want a blow. My brain whirls and I can't stop thinking. I shan't sleep if I stay in."

"Wait ten minutes while I order a cup of tea and I will accompany you, if you permit?"

"Gladly," she said. "I am just tired . . . and this waiting saps one's strength."

He realized she was not exaggerating, in spite of her smile. "I have heard that cry so often that I dread it," he said. "Ah! they were expecting me . . . may I order a second cup? No? Then in five minutes I shall be at your service."

There was a fresh breeze when they reached the drive. A young moon, swirling through heavens that shook filmy clouds in her path, suddenly unveiled high in the west. "Going to blow," said the Admiral. "Sou'-west. The Cornish Azrael whipping up his team."

"That means bad weather?" she asked, her voice swift to betray her.

"Not necessarily," he evaded, noting it. "Do you mind wind?"

"I love it," she told him, "but my gear, as Jag calls it, objects."

"Undoubtedly. Indeed, I expect we should be overrun with volunteers of your sex but for the handicap."

"Would that help you, I wonder?"

"If we could keep you in compartments—not otherwise," he laughed.

"Jimmy would hate it," she commented. "He says women and men can't work together any better than a team of mixed angels."

Sheldon laughed without reserve. "I shall have to keep an eye on young Haines," he chuckled. "A man who can joke in spite of war and stunts which may or may not come off, requires backing."

"If he could win that half stripe he's always talking about, he would feel he was on the way to Parnassus," she answered.

"A long climb, Miss Nesbit. Still, I think it is within reach."

"Really? Oh! that's splendid. May I know what he has been doing?"

"If you care to venture as far as the docks," he smiled, "I will show you."

On the way thither she ventured farther, her voice again unsteady, a fact of which the Admiral was instantly aware: "I want to ask you one thing. It is about Captain Haines' last ship."

He walked in silence.

"I was told that the Germans can discover the name of a ship that sinks one of their submarines, and are able to send out and sink her and take her Captain prisoner. Is that possible?"

"In certain conditions they may get information," he said quietly, "but not as a rule."

"And in Captain Haines' case?" she begged.

"I have no knowledge of it, Miss Nesbit; and if I had, I am not sure I might enlighten you. In any case, it would not affect Captain Haines, as he was in the *Vulcan* when he was torpedoed."

"I was afraid you would say that," she faltered, "although you let me down so gently. Sir Douglas was the same."

"Did you ask him this?"

"No; I wouldn't ask twice. But he couldn't answer, for all that."

"May I know what he said?"

"He told me 'Honey is not for the mouth of an Ass, nor knowledge for the mind of a woman'; but he said it so gently he made me want to howl."

"Which I pray I may not have done. Come—we are close to *Chanticleer*. Look at her and remember that possibilities are rarely probable, especially in a contingency such as we are considering."

They halted on the quay wall and stood looking down. A black shape lay beneath, lighted by fires and the evanescent rays of the moon. Long and narrow, especially narrow—that was the picture she found. No wonder Jimmy called her a bathing

machine ! At the moment she was the embodiment of noise. The ceaseless jar of pneumatic riveters deafened them. The Admiral, announcing details in a hoarse shout, failed to get home, as Jimmy would have said. She was spying out the result of what is known as a Stunt in these days, and the clang of hammers beating heavy blows awed her. It made a background of such sound as she associated with a fight at sea. Scores of small figures moved or stood amidst this turmoil. Men were clustered about the after funnels, on bridge and barbette ; others on stages, their heads and shoulders appearing above the farther rail.

"She looks a wreck," Dorothea faltered, her thoughts on Jimmy and the ordeal he had escaped.

"Not a bad example of what H.E. shells can do. Nearly all top-hamper, though. It makes a noise refitting."

"When did it happen ?"

"A week ago—outside, while on patrol. They tumbled up against something in the dark, challenged and got a salvo for reply. That is where we are at a disadvantage. Fritz knows that the only ships he will encounter are enemy ships. We are compelled to challenge lest we fire on our own, and in the interval things happen. The Commander and three of the crew were killed by that salvo, others wounded. Then Haines took charge and sank her. A fine bit of work. I'm proud of him. Didn't he tell you ?"

"Only a word," Dorothea answered. "We talked for two hours, and he said he was 'the miserablest blighter in the Service,' but refused to explain what he meant."

The Admiral glanced sidelong at this girl. Light from a score of flares touched her cheek and showed its pallor. She made a brilliant study—statuesque, wistful. He might have hazarded a guess ; but that would have been to give pain. Haines was a fine young fellow ; yet it seemed wise to leave the battle to those whom it concerned. "I understand," he said, "that he is one of the 'Death or Glory' boys, and prays for chances as some of us pray to escape them. Well," he added, smiling, "he will be acting Commander of the Squad when it goes out, and something may come of it."

"Does he know ?" she begged.

"Undoubtedly."

"Then he should be happy, not miserable," she insisted.

"I should tell you," he evaded, "that those who do not consider it the game to take unnecessary risks call these folk the

'Suicide Club.' I should be sorry to believe he is one of them. I will call him up, for I am compelled to go on board and may not have the pleasure of seeing you back to your hotel."

A bluejacket standing beside the sentry on gangway acknowledged his call, and in a few minutes Jimmy, muffled to the ears in a greatcoat, stood beside Dorothea, "taking over," as he called it, from the Admiral.

"Horrible row," he said airily, "and a devil of a mess down there. Where shall we go?"

"Home, please . . . we can't talk here."

"Home!"—he looked up with the words—"that means Low Willows. Wish to the Lord it were possible!" and moved up quay towards the barrier.

"You are not going to rot now, please!" she begged.

"A whisper is sufficient," said he.

"Why didn't you tell me what happened on your last cruise?" she asked as they faced the street.

"You mean the scrap? Well . . . we aren't permitted the luxury. The Silent Service, you know. Besides, why should I afflict you with horrors? You can read 'em any day in the papers."

"There is heroism as well," she claimed.

"I never was in such a funk in my life," he laughed.

"Tell me," she insisted, refusing analysis.

In half a dozen sentences he recounted the bare details in the jargon of the sea, ending abruptly with, "When a man is driven back nearly to the ropes he hits out and sometimes manages to score. My case exactly."

"And where were you?"

"On the bridge."

"With a dead quartermaster and your skipper dying beside you."

He jerked away from this. "Afraid you've been listening to my Admiral," he said.

"Otherwise how should one know of it?" she smiled.

They came to the sea which rolled mistily to thunder on the foreshore, felt the earth quake, the spray on their cheeks. Scud streamed past shaking fleeced clouds upon the moon. The moon peeped out lighting the bared fangs of the sea, smiling at the staid beach which tossed back each roller as it came.

Across the harbour St Anthony winked upon the scene. In the eye of the gale a gas-buoy mimicked it, faithfully standing

on guard beside a wreck. Beyond the point and the streets were the docks lighting the sky with an evanescent glow.

Dorothea remembered that the flares on *Chanticleer* contributed to that glow—*Chanticleer* whose Commander lay dying when Jimmy took charge, fought and won in a blue funk. She looked at him, debonair and silent beside her, and said, in spite of it, "Tell me why you are the miserablest blighter in the Service?"

He shuffled out of this in a blaze of merriment. "Good Lord! You mustn't take everything I say for gospel. Talking through my hat, that's what . . . bound to unless you are a good hand at lying."

"Which you are not."

"As a matter of fact, it's a scheme I haven't thought out . . . no time these days for complex . . ."

She interrupted this, coming close and watching his eyes. "Are you one of the 'Death or Glory' boys?" she pressed.

"Good Heavens! Why should I be? Where did you hear of them?" said Jimmy in his wardroom manner.

"That complex, too?"

He failed to respond.

"Never heard of the 'Suicide Club' either?" she ventured.

"Look here!" he complained, flustered beyond words, "you ought to be a K.C., defend criminals and all that sort of thing."

"I'm thinking of it," she returned. Then, as he would not face her, she pushed him round. "Why not tell me?" she urged. "We used to be good pals, and I'm sure you don't want to increase our anxiety. It wouldn't be fair to us, nor to the Service, if you took unnecessary risks just because you are fed up, as you say, with waiting . . ."

"Have I said that?"

"Surely the title of your Club sufficiently expresses it."

"My dear Lady Dorothea, you are going beyond your brief."

"It is essential to get at the truth," she waived.

"Now you are angry . . ."

"Sad," she admitted. "Sad! Jag is missing, you sneer at him—indirectly, of course. You know I am troubled, and—in the old days you told me all your troubles and I told you mine . . . won't you trust me in this?"

"True—every word of it. Nothing between us in the beautiful days—Jag or you or me. Everything blurred. No reservations, no evasions; but now we are at war"—he put it so, the song

of the surf in their ears—"and the Lords that be have altered all that. We may not talk, may not hint, may not write. If we do either and trouble comes of it they have a way of taking us out and sticking us against a wall while a file of marines obey orders."

"Jimmy! you are evading," she broke in. "There are no instructions about the 'Death or Glory' boys. The Admiralty knows nothing of them."

"Thank God for that!"

"Officially, I mean."

"And you won't give them away?"

"Why should I?" she asked, amazed. "You are not doing yourself justice. Do you imagine it is nothing to us whether you live or die? Be fair. I only ask you to carry on in the old way without considering the attractions of Death or Glory. Don't you see you are adding to our burden, and that now poor old Jag is missing it really isn't the game?"

He walked beside her, his head bent. There was nothing subtle about Jimmy Haines, his life at college and at sea had seen to that; but he was oppressed beyond words that Dorothea knew anything of this little coterie of officers who had come to light as the "Death or Glory" boys. Belong to them? Certainly he belonged to them; but he could not admit it. In spite of her scorn he must continue to fence; seeing it was equally impossible to lie. He glanced up, searching the beautiful profile.

"Do they know anything of this at home?" he asked her.

"How should they? Aren't they behind the Naval Screen?"

He breathed more freely and said, "Thank God for that!" while beads of perspiration ran down his forehead.

"But," she reminded, "you haven't promised."

"Didn't seem necessary, my dear," he smiled bravely. "I thought you would understand I'm not tired of life; still, if it's any sort of help, I can tell you I have no intention of taking stupid risks. The common sort are enough for me. . . . That do?"

He spoke lightly, but the girl heard a tremor in his voice which was new. It told her he was giving up some scheme, as he would have termed it, on which he had set his mind; yet she could only say in her quiet manner, "That's awfully good of you," and reach out her hands to him. "I knew you wouldn't refuse, because in the old days Jag and you always promised to do as I asked."

He bent low over her hands, taking them in both his, trembling

but alive to her necessities. "Why, of course," he told her in the old phrase, "neither Jag nor I are going to see you rattled. Honest Injun!"

She laughed instantly. "It was Jag who used to say that," she reminded.

"Of course. . . . Lucky Jag!"

The words fell as they moved on for the hotel. No sarcasm in them, no bitterness. To Jimmy they were a simple enunciation of fate, permanent and irrevocable. And in the silence that followed a sea rolled thundering upon the stone-girt walk, fell with a crash and a long-drawn hiss of spray as it retired broken. Dorothea paused listening, and in the quiet said, "Have you ever been in an open boat at sea?"

"Lord! yes, often."

"Without food, hundreds of miles from anywhere and a gale blowing?"

"No—that alters it. No, that's the limit," said Jimmy.

"That was where Jag was when I saw him."

"When you saw him?" he reiterated, puzzled, staring into her eyes.

"In a dream," she said quietly, "weeks and weeks ago."

"I don't believe in them," he answered, sturdily refusing all sympathy, while his heart thumped and he breathed the sailor's prayer when at fault—"Only cranks and fools who go stargazing believe in dreams. Jag isn't in a boat at sea. I'll bet my commission on that. . . ."

"Then where is he?"

"Now you put me in a corner. He may be in some ship going farther and farther away, or a prisoner ashore or afloat . . . anywhere where he can't get a message through; but I'll tell you what I'll do. When Jag turns up we'll all have dinner up here at the hotel, and you shall have *carte blanche*—that do?"

There was a touch of the old buoyancy in his voice as he rattled this off—"Open boats? Yes—lots of 'em . . . that's where I pity the Cinderella-men when I have time to think. But Jag isn't there. He has seen some way out and has taken it. Miracles don't often happen at sea, but now and again they do, and Jag's the breed who knows how to take his chance. Look here, Lady D., Jag is my brother, my pal. We weren't brought out of the same nursery for nothing. I own I liked to twist his tail. We all do it. There's no question of Heaven or Hell in that—it's just boyishness. You see, I can tell you this," he embroidered here quite

unwittingly, "if Jag doesn't seize his chance now, then Jag isn't Jag."

Dorothea caught at this, her heart leaping. "His chance? Do you know anything? Has any message come?"

"Nothing," he told her, angry at the slip. "Trust me to let you know directly we have news."

Dorothea walked in silence, a prayer on her lips. Jimmy walked beside her, a prayer born of the flush that touched him as once before on his ride from Portsmouth when his cycle nearly crashed.

The moon sprayed light through its veil. It looked down upon these two halted a moment to gaze at the sea. No words escaped, no tears. They passed as others had and entered the hotel.

The hall porter handed a telegram as they came. "Commander Haines," he said, "came just after you left, sir."

Jimmy took it, tore the envelope and read. Then he crumpled it in his pocket and said to Dorothea, "Sorry, old Thing. I must get down to the Base. See you later—so long."

"Nothing from Jag?" she whispered, holding him.

"Nothing. I must see the Chief, that's all." And he was gone.

In his pocket lay a message from his father which said, "Bad experience last night. Your mother has passed away. Come."

Nothing of what happened, nothing of their stress—the bare details as passed by the Censor.

CHAPTER II

PLAY THE GAME

TAKING over a new destroyer from Laird's held Jimmy four days out of the five which were to clapse before the funeral, and at noon, when he reached the Rectory, it stood with doors thrown wide to receive him, those who had awaited him already gone into the church.

The service was half said when Haines entered and found a seat beneath the ruined west window. Strangely still he sat, marking the silence, his eyes on the coffin far up the aisle. It all seemed out of focus, distorted; the silence unbearable. Some one was reading prayers. He wondered whom. Dim, far off, singularly pathetic was a small group near the chancel—Dick and Madge were there—while the rest of the church was crowded with parishioners. Some one was making signs that Jimmy might find room up there with his sister and brother. Yet he remained still until the moment came for him to join in the procession with his father. Elizabeth was there too . . . Lord! how they had worn her in the old days. There was a stranger officiating. Jimmy linked arms with his father and stayed beside him; then, when all was done, walked back with the dear old Owner to discuss the future and plan plans. The house was crumbling about their ears. Jag, Buz . . . and now the gentle mother; the talk went on till it was time for Jimmy to jump into the car which was to take him to the Naval special for the West. Madge went with him to Town, to resume her work as a V.A.D.

Dick remained.

As a schoolboy of seventeen who had striven to edit his birth certificate so that a genial sergeant of his acquaintance should pass him for the Army, Dick had what Jimmy that weary afternoon had called "a cheek." He was his father's youngest son, the most tractable, the most adorable, and for several years he was immune—then, "Why in God's name try to get pipped?" as Jimmy less delicately put it. His place was at home with Madge. Jag was gone, or as good as gone; the little mother on her way to meet him . . . Buz wounded; what in the world was the sense of taking further risks? Jimmy had no good word to say for it and went off having cursed where Dick had looked for blessing.

At the moment his brother's words had the desired effect; but before he went to bed that night they brought revolt. He was very young; full of a great longing to do something to knock out those brutes who made war on women. He did not under-

stand how it happened or why she died ; but one thing was plain—a beastly Boche had killed her, and he must get into khaki in one way or another so that he might *strafe* the brute. As far as he understood it they had got Jag also . . . poor old Jag who was always good for a sov., and Buz who was wounded in that last do at the Front.

Jimmy, he argued, staring through an open window at the stars, went to Osborne when he was thirteen and a bit. The chaps who were at Dartmouth, “only two and a half years out of the egg,” were drafted into the Fleet at the outbreak of war ; then why should he be kept out of it for another two years ? He could fly. All he wanted was the chance.

Dick had read how Icarus made himself waxen wings to escape from Crete, and was quite sure he wouldn’t have fallen into the sea if only he had used linen. The motive power adopted by Icarus did not trouble Dick. The only burden he recognized lay in the fact that no one would permit him to fly for two years—and by that time he acknowledged, rueful, there would be no Huns left to crash. It was his age that blocked him. A year or a year and a half stood between him and Paradise !

He became sleepy as he wrestled with the problem and presently dreamed peacefully of rudder-bars and petrol gauges ; Klaxons and a cockpit where he sat straining eyes to catch sight of a Boche he had sent spinning. Then the beast managed to flatten out and climbed until he got level. He woke during the fight which ensued.

Dick’s head ached. He was armed with the decorative jargon of battle, but how to do the Authorities so that he might begin became the burden of his new day. He got up scheming schemes and scrapping them. He went out. Perhaps he might see his sergeant—but nothing came of it. Then, as luck would have it, after lunch, while marching down High Street, he espied young Dawson “swelling it” on the pavement—cane, putties and cadet cap, all worn jauntily in full view. Dick crossed at once to inspect him.

“Hallo !” said he. “Giving us a treat ? How did *you* get in ?”

“Did ’em in the eye,” said the child. He was little more.

“Where ?”

The child explained.

“How far’s that from here ?”

“Thirty-five minutes on a bike. Two hours by train, if you can get one.”

"Think they want any more ? "

"Sure they do."

"Got a bike ? "

"Got the guv'nor's. It's the only way to get about these days."

"Take me down. I want to join up," persuaded Dick.

"You'll have to do it off your own bat."

"Right-o ! You take me along. I'll do the rest."

"Swear you won't give the show away," the child pleaded.

"Honour bright. Think I want to get you court-martialled, or whatever it is they do to liars ? " asked Dick.

"Come now ? "

"If you can get me back before tea."

Apparently this was not impossible, for in ten minutes Dick Haines was astride the carrier of a motor-cycle helping to kick off for the great south road. The thing snorted, emitting vile fumes, then settled down into her stride at forty miles an hour and disappeared from High Street.

When Dick next saw the Rectory it was dark. He had taken what in other branches of the Service is known as the King's shilling, and the Rector was out with old Nesbit, who had called to give him a run in the car.

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Jimmy reached Paddington in sufficient time to enable him to wire to Dorothea the hour of his return. Then he climbed into the train, found a corner where he could rest and settled down to take it. In the old days he would have looked for a pal ; but to-night he purposely avoided the Naval section and took his place among the soldiers.

Had he been asked he might have answered he was tired ; but he could not have explained why he telegraphed to Dorothea. He was not engaged to Dorothea and could not reasonably expect her to sit up half the night in order to greet him. He was asleep before they ran through Stroud, oblivious that any question had arisen on the subject, and smiling over the fact that he had won his half stripe, was in command of K 89 and was down on Sheldon's list for D.S.O. He would be the equal of his brother at last, who had done with his ship's nose what Jimmy so far had failed to do with a full armament. Even in his sleep this knowledge stirred him.

They came in due course to Falmouth, and Jimmy, alert as on his own bridge, looked out as the train swept in, but with the

feeling of a man who has expected too much. Of course, he was searching for Dorothea—as though she were likely to be at that end of the platform!

She had not come. It was simple foolishness to expect that she would. She was asleep in the lounge of her hotel, reading rubbish or yarning with the Cinderella-men's champion. . . . Scarcely loyal, that! Jimmy acknowledged the comment, flushing. Still, she had not come. The emptiness of it all! Hope, love! All with last year's mess bills. He took up his suit-case, cane—alighted. Lord! how hollow it all was. He moved to the exit fumbling for his pass.

Then, quite at a jog-trot, one of those vehicles Jimmy had called a droshky on the night when Dorothea first came to Falmouth drew up at the curb. Some one arriving, after all . . . not Dorothea by chance? He turned to look and saw her hurrying after him. Again the heavens opened. Gladness, thankfulness swept over Jimmy in a hot flush that left him stammering.

"This is jolly sweet of you!" he cried out. "Je-just as I was cussing my luck, too. . . . I dared not hope you would come after the way I scuttled off without . . ."

"But you wired," she told him, her eyes cold.

"Yes—I dared do that. Mad, wasn't it?"

"Why did you go without telling me what had happened?" she questioned, bringing him back.

He shrank at the change of tone; her voice was cold now, as well as her eyes.

"What was the use of worrying you? I—I hate to see you troubled. Besides, there was no sense in telling you. . . . Didn't know myself till I got home. Held up . . . censored," he explained, "by My Lords. I—I wanted to wring somebody's neck."

Her eyes softened. She broke in swiftly with her beautiful contralto—"And I blamed you! Jimmy, I am sorry." She moved nearer holding out her hands, and he took them in his, gripping more tightly than he was aware.

"Guessed that!" he said, with an attempt at bravado. Then, with quaint sorrow, as she tried to obtain freedom, "Jove! I believe I was hurting your hands," and released her.

She took no notice, but moved towards the cab, saying, "Was she much hurt . . . was it very terrible?"

"Untouched," he told her. "Heart failure—nothing more."

"Poor little mother!" Dorothea whispered, her eyes full.

"That's where the new methods come in. War on Civilians

as well as Service men. Damnable ! Result of not being ready, of course. Every new war will be worse than the last. . . . Steady ! little girl . . . or I—‘ It’s a long, long way to Tipperary,’ ” he chanted. “ Wonder I sent that wire, though.”

“ If you hadn’t sent it I should have come on chance. Admiral Sheldon told me everything and said he expected you by it. He says,” she ran on, “ you are going out in the morning, but you are to get some sleep first.”

Not a word about his new command ! Not a word from Jimmy, either.

“ Kind ! As a matter of fact, I slept all the way down so that I might be awake now,” he laughed, catching fire in an instant, buoyant at the interest she evinced ; buoyant as an hour ago seemed impossible. “ I’m ready now, as far as that goes. Never felt better in my life. A chop and a smoke will top things off . . . shall we walk or ride ? ”

“ Walk. I’ve paid the man.”

“ He can take my bag,” Jimmy tossed back, his thoughts racing. He gave the driver his luggage and a fare which produced the requisite intelligence, then turned to Dorothea.

“ I shall be thankful to stretch my legs,” he assured her.

“ Yes ; but how are they all at home ? ” Dorothea asked, checking this.

Jimmy had nearly forgotten their existence. He hated tragedy. Life was not intended to be tragic. It was intended to run as in the old days at Low Willows—and it would, but for this war. He sobered somewhat and gave a picture of her home, the Rectory, the Downs, the church ; all in his clipped phraseology, and was coming back to the reason of his telegram when Dorothea tripped him once more : “ Yes—but how is the Padre ? ”

“ Wonderful. Calm, considering the shock . . . but I think he is older. I never saw him so quiet.”

Calm, quiet, older . . . Dorothea captured this, recognizing their effect on the Rector with unerring precision.

“ And mother ? ” she asked.

“ Rather broken up. You see, your father will be off to France, and . . . ”

Dorothea stood still, her eyes startled : for a moment she had forgotten her father’s talk.

“ Going to France ? But he is in the Volunteers—sure you aren’t mixing things up, Jimmy ? ”

"No—all correct. He's going over with the car. Any number of men are doing it . . . women too. Red Cross work, you know."

"Yes, yes—I remember he spoke of it," she breathed. Then, with swift emphasis, "How splendid of him ! Oh ! I am proud . . . and we used to be so hard on him ! You are sure it's true ?"

"Absolutely. Mrs Nesbit told me."

"Poor mother," Dorothea whispered. "Yes, I can guess she is troubled. The woman's part, Jimmy—and he may be at the Front."

"Front-line dressing-stations, probably," said Jimmy. Then, because he saw the eagerness disappear, "By the way, the Owner's west window is a wreck. All that wonderful glass gone ; stonework, tracery, every scrap of it lying on the grass. Bedroom window ditto. The second bomb just missed the flags and burst in a cabbage patch. Lucky for us—otherwise the Rectory would have followed suit."

They came up the hotel drive discussing this and the damage done in Town. Jimmy's view of the Tubes, too, was illuminating. London was a new city. He scarcely knew it now that raids or the possibility of raids were of nightly occurrence. Luckily the gas-bags did not often get past Borkum. Jimmy was not at liberty to say more ; but Dorothea might understand that the Navy had the thing in hand and before long folk would see blazing gas-bags.

CHAPTER III

EX "IBIS"

THE sun was up when Dorothea glanced out upon the day which promised to end her suspense ; but when the maid brought tea she handed a note which had arrived from the Base. It stated that the trawler known as J.R. 149 would not arrive as had been anticipated, so would Miss Nesbit call at eleven o'clock, when the Admiral hoped to be able to speak more definitely ?

She was there on the minute, dry-eyed, quiet, accepting Sheldon's explanation as he rolled out technicalities of "engine trouble," asking the few questions which seemed essential—still, as he had never seen her. Then back to the Marine Drive, deciding as she walked that it would be impossible to face the lounge where women sat always ready to talk, or to condole with those who seemed to desire silence.

She came presently to a post office, sent a wire to the Padre asking him to come down and help, then moved on. Action was essential. She told herself, with a little twist of impatience, it was beyond her power to keep from brooding otherwise. She came to a garage, hired a car and drove by way of Penryn and Helston to the Lizard, where for the rest of the day she remained enthralled by the grey splendour of the sea as it rolled amidst the rocks at her feet.

Night found her again in Falmouth walking the darkened streets, watching others who moved, as she did, like pale ghosts of phantasy unable to escape their kin. No lights anywhere ; wind singing the song of a sou'-west gale ; here and there the whitened edges of the curb, whitened posts and small landmarks made luminous so that those who were abroad at night might recognize pitfalls as they crept back to their homes at night. So it went on for three days and nights of interminable stress—the girl wilting under the strain, losing confidence, losing faith. She came up the hotel drive on this last night and caught sight of Jimmy doing sentry-go before the entrance. He hastened to greet her, crying out, "Where have you been ? One-four-nine will be in to-night, and the Owner wires he has found a locum and is coming."

"When ?"

"To-night—and Sir Douglas is with him."

"Jimmy—not really !"

"Fact! Wire's for you as well." He handed it. "And now I must cut away. I'll be at the station—Naval Special." He glanced about and back at the girl. "Glad I waited," he laughed. "It's bucked you no end."

"But about the trawler?" she questioned as he prepared to go.

"Nothing fresh; but she'll be in."

He was astride his motor-cycle and the thing chuffed with the noise of a machine-gun. He waved his hand, but Dorothea had entered the lounge.

She was waiting on the platform when the express ran in, Jimmy running up just as the two travellers alighted. Dorothea reached the Rector first. He looked worn; but his eyes brightened as she took his hand in both hers. "I couldn't wait! I had to call you," she cried, and stood quiet beside him.

He saw her stress and answered, "I was thankful to get away for a time. I was able luckily to arrange for a supply at short notice. A London man, not sorry, I fancied, to escape the city." He glanced about, his voice unsteady. "His wife unable, he told me, to endure the strain of the air raids." Then swiftly covering that, "And how are you, dear child? Any news from the sea?" He watched her in the dim light from under pent brows.

The Admiral, with Jimmy beside him, was returning from the luggage van. He caught the words as Dorothea turned to greet him, cheery as always, "Despair killed the snake, my child, not the horns which refused to rot off." He referred to the history of a greedy boa which had swallowed an ox—a reminiscence of his prowess as a story-teller in days when Dorothea stood with wonder-laden eyes at his knee.

That night after dinner she caught him beside the fire in his sitting-room, waiting their arrival, and she came near at once, her voice very unlike anything he could remember, so faintly she began: "I want to ask you, please, if there is any news they are keeping back? Don't be angry . . . I'm awfully done. . . ."

"Anything kept back? Tut-tut!" He glanced sidelong, caught her glance, and added more gently, "Tell me all you know, my child."

She recounted the various snippets, the delays, and spoke of her dread until he stopped her with, "No, nothing else is known. The delay obviously arises because this boat is in need of an overhaul and cannot be spared from patrol. Don't get frightened.

Admiral Sheldon knows his men ; but we will look into it presently. Meanwhile we are going to be busy getting some colour into our cheeks and you are going to trust the Navy . . . By the way, your friend Effie Massenshaw should be here shortly. . . .” He watched her, a smile growing behind the stern mask.

“Effie !” She rose and came near.

“Well, why not ?”

“No reason, Admiral—but I had a letter from her the other day saying she was in Paris.”

“Anything else by chance ?”

“That she had been in Copenhagen.”

“Copenhagen, eh ? Any reason given ?”

“None—only I gathered she thought the war would go on for years and years. . . . Will it ?—for you see when Jag comes home he will have to go out again . . . and—and I’m beginning to be afraid.” She pushed a cushion close and, as he did not speak, half sat, half kneeled, beside him, her lips quivering. “Effie knows—mightn’t I know, too ? Anything is better than uncertainty. It kills. It makes us old if it does not kill—and, and I can’t do things like Effie. What has Copenhagen to do with the war ? Won’t you help me ? I am of your blood. I can face things and hold my tongue . . . I can bear anything if only I know what is happening and why——” She broke off faltering, leaning on the arm of his chair ; but there were no tears.

He took her hand and held it. “Copenhagen, my dear, is the entrepôt through which Germany is fed and kept supplied with the raw material of war, and Effie Massenshaw has been there for the Admiralty on my guarantee.”

“But surely *we* don’t find supplies !” she cried, a flush mantling her.

“Um !” he twisted out, “perhaps we, too, take a hand in the deal. Let that suffice . . .” And, following this up, he stared at the door, asking, “Where in the world is the Padre and young Haines ?”

“I asked them to let me get in a word first,” she told him, the flush mounting.

“You did, eh ?” He rose, touched the bell and an orderly appeared. “Please give my compliments to Mr Haines and Commander Haines and say we await the pleasure of their company.” Then as the man departed he turned round. “Quite satisfied with the result ?” he asked.

“You have given me your confidence and I am proud,” she

smiled, her fingers laced about one knee as she leaned back on her stool.

"And disillusioned one I love. God rest us all! I am off to see the C.-in-C. and hope to be busy while you sleep."

The others entered presently, and after a chaffing recognition of the new half-stripe on Jimmy's cuffs, he left them to the fire.

At noon the next day Dorothea went down with the Padre to see the trawler now resting at the pier. On her bow was painted in white letters J.R. 149, so that the world of ships might know and appraise her. In her cabins she carried the remnant of those taken from the boat by *Ibis*, Norge, the neutral that halted in the Bay with the colours of Norway blazoned on her side.

Flags were at her signal-yard, the white ensign fluttering at half-mast. She was bedraggled from her contest with the sea; rusty, nose in air. One of her crew standing on the small square of her bridge had waved flags in response to a mordant challenge from the Base. True. She was laggard. She acknowledged her shortcomings. It was her privilege as also it was her shame. Nothing was to be gained by obscurity. She had endured. No one was the worse for it, while her passengers certainly had gained strength. That surely might be placed to her credit!

The trawler's "Admiral" commented on her sins with austere verbiage; but it produced no back talk—because, when you think of it, it is the province of brass hats to speak with a snap in all Services, lest the rank and file imagine tradition dead and the Service on its way to burial. So J.R. 149 set to work to prepare for the advent of brass hats, the carriage to the city's mortuary of one known on *Vulcan's* pay-sheet as John Johnson and the landing on stretchers of a bo'sun and two others who had "stuck it."

Eight bells echoed across the harbour as Sir Douglas came down the gangway and led the way back to the hotel. Walking between Dorothea and the Padre, he headed them away from the pier explaining the position. "It's no use going there to harrow your feelings," he said. "They know nothing. Haines was standing on the bridge when they last saw him. He was never in their boat, nor amidst the wreckage. They pulled away to escape the U-boat, and later came back to search for him. And he will return because of these facts. I am convinced of it—you believe?"

"What else can I do?" she asked, calm in spite of her stress.

"At the moment nothing. Wait till the men are in hospital and you shall have *carte blanche*. They are being prepared for the ambulance." He took her hands in his, adding, "You don't suppose I am keeping anything back, do you?"

"No, no . . . I trust you. There is no one else."

"Good! Then go to the hotel, and I will follow as soon as possible." He turned away and vanished in the trawler's cabin, while they made their way back as he desired.

She was waiting and alone in the sitting-room when he entered shortly before lunch. He crossed and sat down, saying with the old verve, "I am glad you returned. You shall see them presently . . . meanwhile I have had a chat with the trawler's skipper—a splendid fellow! He told me the Navy was being played with, 'sent out to bite after a visit to the dentist who had drawn all its teeth!' That to me, if you please! But worse was to follow. 'If we sailors had our way, sir, wi' these U-boat chaps when we take 'em, it's not Donnington Hall the blighters would see, but the fo'c'sle head of the patrols an' merchant ships from now to the end of the war. Then, sir, if so be we got scuppered, they'd get scuppered likewise; an' if we went up to Gawd-Almighty piecemeal, they'd make their number same as we . . .'"

"That was my man! I could have hugged him. No fears of 'complications' about him, nor any use for 'Notes' and the talk of diplomacy. We are at war, he said. Good! Let 'em have it."

And Dorothea, with swift intuition, her cheeks flushed, daring in her glance, said, "Is that the reason why there are 'Death or Glory' boys in the Navy, I wonder?"

He turned slowly to face her, saw what he saw and answered, "'Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings' . . . by the way, where did you hear of *them*?"

"Then the Admiralty does know of them?" she commented, absorbed.

"Of course. Queer old lady, the Admiralty . . . but *you*?"

"Need I tell you that, Sir Douglas? Really I would rather not."

"Nor do I wish to hear. There are some things no Admiral wishes to hear. This is one of them. . . . Come, we will find the Padre and get down to lunch."

CHAPTER IV

BOUND NORTH

THERE is nothing so embarrassing as a sudden change of front on the part of one hitherto you have regarded as an enemy. Yet that was the position in which Haines found himself. He had promised to help Nekker to a passage across the Styx. Not very long ago he had half strangled the sinister personage who had sat beside him making conversation in the boat. Now he was going to help him navigate.

The U-boat was lying contentedly nuzzling the buoy to which she was tethered, an engineer and petty officer standing before the conning-tower to receive them. Nekker climbed on board and instantly turned to Haines with, "Come down to my cabin and get warm."

Haines had expected to be sent below, perhaps to the cell he had occupied before. He stared. Then Nekker, speaking very clearly, said, "You are wet. Come down to the cabin and I find you change of cloze." He presented his back with the words and got into the conning-tower. He left Haines free to jump overboard or play the fool in any way he chose—and still Haines stared. It was the opportunity he had prayed for; but now he was too weary and stiff to take it. Nor was he aware of any mental flexions as he followed Nekker through the hatch and into the cabin. The great man was standing before a rack which held bottles and tumblers, pouring out a stiff dram.

"Here," he cried, "drink ziss. It will put you right. . . . I sorry that damned fool should take me so literally. It was not my intention to carry out wot I said. I know my orders better. I think he was mad. Drink. It is brandy—see?" He poured a portion into a second glass and swallowed it. "The best! Taken so it is but medicine."

At the back of his mind he knew that this sailor would never drink with him, nor take his hand; and he was concerned lest he should have a sick man to attend instead of a navigator.

Haines took his medicine without words. Nekker faced him, his eyes flickering. For a second their gaze met; then Nekker turned away, struck a match and puffed at a cigarette. "Smoke?" He offered his case.

Haines shook his head. "Thanks, no. I am no good at that kind of thing."

"As you will."

He smoked for some minutes, sitting on the edge of a locker;

then again looked up. "I am instructed to take you home," he announced. "I am instructed alzo to take home with me any other Captains I may find on the way. Captains of all ships are to be taken prisoner. It is a new regulation. Perhaps they think if we take enough captains prisoner, it will end the war . . . Piff ! I have no words."

"I thought you said the boat was so damaged you could not work her home," Haines suggested.

"That seems not to be the caze, after all. I am glad," he commented.

"Certainly—if we are to get back."

"Oh ! we reach right enough. I have additional burdens, nothing more. My Kommandant shuffles them from his shoulders to the shoulders of U-boat Kommandant. We get used to it in time. Now I go on deck to get away. I give orders to steward to give you cloze. They belong to ship's store. They will be charged to your account ; your food and drink will be charged also against the sum which will be allotted to you by my Government. You will be under guard all the time till I hand you over, but you will not be confined or put in irons wizout a cause. That, I think, is understood ? "

"Quite."

Nekker's eyes narrowed, but he flicked ashes from his cigarette and said, "I may be compelled to ask for your assistance with navigation. In that caze you will doubtless be guided by the knowledge that if you do anything to endanger the ship your life will be forfeit at once. I do not threaten. I am short-handed . . . that, I think, is also understood—no ? "

Haines permitted himself no gibe, yet he was amazed at the man's effrontery. He could not guess what lay behind it, but his chief puzzle lay in the accusation the man had made against the doctor who no longer existed either to confirm or deny his madness. A small sound disturbed him and he glanced round to see the steward entering with an armful of clothes. That checked further speculation. The man proceeded to spread out suits of blue cloth, oilskins, shirts ; while Haines, recognizing him as one of those who under the doctor's orders helped him in the past, said, "Yes, I shall be glad of a change," and took up a shirt ; "but if you will ask him to come, I should like to see the Herr Doktor first."

The steward looked scared, glanced round and said, "Ze doktor not able to come, sare. He killet on ze pier."

"Killed—are you sure?"

"Zere is no doubt, sare. Four uzzers are killet also."

"Was he mad?" Haines asked.

"Matt! No. He was good to us. We miss him much."

Haines bent down, measuring a collar-band and saying, "From what Herr Kommandant told me I thought he had stayed ashore because he had become mad."

"Not so," the man spluttered. "Herr Kommandant knows well why the Herr Doktor has not return. Kommandant, he matt . . . matt an' dangerous."

"I will take this shirt," Haines decided, "and this suit. Wait—I want to know . . ."

The steward's eyes registered fear. He whimpered, "Ze Kommandant, sare, kommen," and stooped over the clothes.

"I want to know," Haines reiterated, a thrill running down his spine, "whether you have charge of the medicine chest."

The steward became alert at once. "No, sare; but I get wot you want."

"Lint and boracic, and a basin of water," Haines ordered.

Von Nekker passed in his silent shoes to the farther cabin and came back swinging his glasses.

"I forget zese," he smiled. "Got all you want?"

"Thank you—yes."

He made no pause, smiled and went out. Haines stooped over the steward who still gathered the clothes. "I was going to say, Where is my guard?" he asked close in the man's ear.

"Wizin zat room where Herr Kommandant go," came the reply.

"Armed, of course?"

"Yes, sare."

"Can he see what goes on here?"

"Yes—zere is a place."

Haines knelt beside him examining the buttons of an oilskin coat. "What are you afraid of?" he asked.

"All are afraidt—all, because he is matt. You not make 'im angry, sare . . . you do wot he ask?"

"I will do what I can. Get these buttons sewn on better for me—and bring that boracic."

"Salbe?"

"Yes—and a basin of water."

The steward vanished, and Haines crossed the tiny cabin as the surface engines began to splutter and groan at their new task.

A thin bulkhead divided the messroom in which he stood from the engines and Control. He waited there, a prayer on his lips that Von Nekker's madness should be stayed. He waited, marking the resumption of those weird noises to which he had become accustomed, marvelling at their variety, and the vessel trembled under him gathering way. She was off on the home stretch, her oil tanks filled, torpedoes in place, shells replenished. She jerked and vibrated, coming round on her helm to face the nor'-west ; the long, long stretch which would see her skirting the Bay, the Irish coast, and far away in the north throwing sprays which would freeze and alter her trim, with Nekker, who was mad, in control. He visualized the trip as it would be and found no comfort in the picture ; but it would lead him homeward, to the land he loved, to Dorothea, and for that end he would have bartered his soul.

The cluckings and weird splutterings redoubled and Haines found himself listening, straining ears to the issue he faced. The vessel quaked as though under fire. Shrill screams arose and died . . . gaspings, snortings—he knew them all and quaked at the knowledge. Then came a slow declension of sound, less vibration, and he remembered that, although the engines still slobbered and choked like pigs at a trough, they were settling down in their stride and presently would beat out the measure of the boat's great heart without fracture.

Other noises ensued, the whine of pumps, bubblings, and Haines knew they were trimming. Fans whirred, driving the oil-tainted air through cabins and passages. They were away ! To-morrow he would wake with a head and a tongue—if ever he waked at all. Indubitably, at this moment Haines missed the steadying force of Herr Doktor, a Squarehead whom apparently he could trust.

The steward re-entered carrying a jug of warm water and the ointment. He crossed the messroom and opened the cabin which Haines had known as the doctor's, and said :

“ I am to give you ziss room, sare, wiz Herr Kommandant's complements. I put out ze watter an' cloze.”

Haines followed and stood just within. The bed unfolded from a bulkhead. The table, washstand, seat, all came out from the bulkhead or went up to the beams. It was snug . . . and a fan whirled hot air from a tube.

He watched the steward preparing, and as he stood ready to

go asked him how Herr Doktor had come by his end. He had imagined Nekker's hand in this encounter; but he was wrong. The steward, speaking with a guttural twist, made that plain.

It seemed that as Nekker and those who were with him approached the pier they heard the rattle of fire-arms at the end of it . . . "but," said the steward, "zay could not get zare queek enough. Zey reached only in time to see ze Herr Doktor was dying and two ozzers dead. Herr Doktor said it was mutiny. Ze men refuse to again go to U-boat. Zey try to get 'im down, zen 'ee shoot an' zay shoot, an' afterwards Herr Kommandant an' ze ozzers shoot what are left. Fife men an' ze doktor all die togezzer . . ." Just now it had been four. "Zat bad, sare. It make ze sheep difficult to get 'ome."

Haines acknowledged this in his own way as the steward left him to change, dress his wound and eat in the still solitude of the doctor's cabin.

. . . .

U 59 crept like a Mayfly over seas which aped the pond lying amidst trees deep in the heart of Cranwood Common.

A periscope drawing a thin feather of spray moved up the Bay as the Mayfly moved on the pond; and here on the wider ocean birds came out of the blue to follow in its wake, diving, whirling, occasionally uttering the sad note of their kind. Sometimes they hovered so near the lens, they seemed to argue the policy of alighting. Webbed feet thrust out, head twisted, they dropped from the heights, then whirled and came to the cloud of their fellows.

Something had happened, they could not tell what. The periscope had dipped—for a moment the face of the sea was bare and only the loom of a vast mass was apparent. That remained. It was perhaps the carcase of a dead whale, or an upturned boat so laden with limpets and slugs of the sea that it sagged under water.

The whole undulating mass pointed to a vast feeding-ground which presently would come to the surface and lie like a ray basking in sunlight. Then the birds would feast and fight, swerve and whirl crying of their find, and their fellows would hasten to the banquet.

Nekker at the eyepiece of his periscope damned the birds in raucous German, and twitched at the tube as they approached

to alight. He said that Hades would be peopled by birds if only to haze sailors. The Elysian Fields would be stocked with them, but instead of eyes they would have holes through which men could look for the souls of the dead on whom they had battered. And he prayed he might be granted weapons with which he could fight them. Here, a commander was a mere effigy, and a periscope, it appeared, was designed specially to lure birds in its track.

He called Haines to aid him and sat droning his elegy in a voice of singular dissonance. It was imperative, he announced, to get rid of these birds, but he was unable to do so. Haines advised greater immersion—they were at thirty feet—but Nekker pushed that from him. He had no love for the silence which came of greater depths. It touched his imagination too nearly. No—it would be better to go up than to go down. Presently it would be necessary to go up, in any case, to recharge the batteries ; but he hoped to peg on until dusk. To go up in this glare was foolishness, by James ! . . . yet he feared it would come to that—and again the drone was resumed, Nekker at one eye-piece, Haines at another.

. . . He was tracked, his position pointed out, he was helpless. It was this calm. They would pay for that presently. Meanwhile he and all who were with him were moving with glorious certitude to the end of all U-boats. Had Haines any notion of how many failed to return to the Base ? Of course not. But he (Nekker) knew. It was colossal . . . and here they were being tracked, shown up, pointed at, and could do nothing to check it. "It was spy work, by the Lord ! Nothing better. A plume of smoke was evanescent in comparison with a flight of gulls, comorants and the rest . . ." He was inclined to argue. "It must be either up or down." He favoured the surface. "It would not be more dangerous than this . . . and they could be recharging their accumulators. See anything, anywhere except birds ?"

Haines had been examining a splotch on the northern horizon and now had made sure. He pointed it out, and Nekker choked. "God ! You are right—we stay w'ere we are a bit. We must watch zat . . . God !" again came the cry, "how my eyes ache—presently I am blind as well . . . but you—you are fresh . . . watch out ! Watch out !"

He was clammy ! He droned at the elegy, and sat back pressing his eyes. He was untubbed, unshaven, miserable, pursued by an enemy that blurred his periscope, implacable. He cursed

the days he had spent in England, because they had given him an appetite for cleanliness ! He vowed that could he see his time over again he would alter all that, wear a beard and go with clogged pores in order that now he might be immune from " this sensitiveness." He put it so in a dull shout, the sweat pouring down to blind him. But the malady from which Von Nekker suffered was complex rather than simple, deep-set and likely to harm others as well as himself.

For a week this had gone on, a threnody of monotonous intent. They had come from their rendezvous at Torre del Fuero listening to its burden and had crept up the coast marking the funk which Nekker discovered whenever the risk became tense. The absence of the spy-man scarcely affected the issue. He was whelmed by new cares. Off the Burlings he had seen snakes, at Finisterre a holocaust, and now it seemed quiet weather, calm, had been prepared by the gods for his undoing.

Haines came to be his right hand during this passage ; he was more companion than prisoner ; free to move about as he willed, but shadowed always by one who bore arms lest he should slip. It was a curious position. In other circumstances it would have amused ; here it became wearisome. One cannot for ever harp on one string without fraying it. The man was not mad, he was in a state of extreme tension, and, as Haines phrased it, ready to play the fool at any moment. The trouble was that each moment presented a possible effervescence.

The steward considered it likely that if Nekker came in touch with a prize he would harden and get a grip of himself. Haines doubted this, but the steward was emphatic. He had seen it happen before. It proved to the man that he still had power, still could direct events, win victory and assert his worth. But it must be easy, not complex—the slaughter of one of the milch cows that fed the Allies, for example, not a fighting ship. . . . That was beyond him. The Captain would see what he meant if a chance came. Well, hitherto there had been no chance. Now one approached, and Haines was uncertain whether to laugh or to cry.

A British tramp drew out of the haze. There was very little doubt of her nationality. The dark grey hull and short masts proclaimed that. She wore no colours on her side as did the neutrals ; she failed to zigzag, but came boldly on ; she burned Welsh coal. Nekker, with his eye steady, his plaint forgotten, watched her approach. It seemed to Haines that the steward's

prophecy would bear fruit. He was fascinated and repelled in turn. For the first time in memory Haines' knees shook under him. He desired to warn this ship of her inevitable doom, and could imagine no way of doing so. Sick at heart, he turned from his periscope and saw close at his elbow a sinister figure on guard, ready with a bayonet to prod at him . . .

Von Nekker's voice no longer whining a dirge, sounded, giving orders to go slow and to starboard. Beside him a sailor transmitted the command. The song of the dynamos lessened, and Haines glanced round to see the helmsman standing with his gaze fixed on the compass, watching it as he moved the wheel in answer to Nekker's quiet order. Perhaps that steadied him. He had been on the brink of action—fool action, he told himself as he returned to his seat before the periscope. It had been in his mind to smash the eye-pieces of these instruments, but upon that instant of headiness came the knowledge that Nekker could rise to the surface and fire point-blank. That stayed Haines as no other consideration could. It pulled him together, compelled reason.

Incidentally, of course, he would have been skewered by that dull specimen of the *pickelhaube* tribe who stood ready to intervene. And he would not have saved the ship. Nekker, who had grown suddenly calm, would have scored. "Sink and leave no trace," would have rung again in mocking iteration to death-cries. Possibly, another captain would have been added to the U-boat's bag.

Haines leaned forward, his brow furrowed with thought. He stared at the coming steamer and heard Nekker chuckling over his eye-piece. Then came short, snarling phrases which produced a stir in the fore part of the submarine, and Haines caught the whine of compressed air, the clash of steel as torpedoes were brought to the ready.

And as if that had inspired him, Haines cried out in a voice he scarcely knew:

"Wait . . . wait!"

Nekker turned and looked from under bent brows. "So?" he questioned, quiet as Haines had not seen him for days, "what for?"

Haines faced him, importunate, eager. "Are you sure," he asked, "of the character of that boat?"

"Sure?" Nekker jeered. "Of course. British. Tramp, outward with coal for Italy, homeward with food for your people . . . if I let her,"

"I think you are wrong," Haines insisted.

"I take my chance of that," Nekker tossed back. But he gave no further orders. He stared again into the eye-piece. Haines did the same. He was cool now, Nekker becoming alarmed in spite of his pose. Haines kept silent. He argued swiftly that suggestion was sufficient, that he had done more to save the ship already than had he attempted to smash things.

Nekker swept the horizon with his periscope, lurched, damned and leaned forward pressing his eyes. "Birds! Birds!" he complained. "I cannot see for birds, and my eyes ache. . . . You are fresh. What have you seen on that ship to make you say zat?"

"I think," said Haines, "if we get too near she will tell you of it."

"How?"

"Guns," said Haines.

"I see none."

"Were the guns visible on your raiders when they passed our patrols?"

"Of course zey were not."

"Then is it likely our raiders will show them?"

"Piff! That is no raider. Your people would not dare put guns while America objects."

"When I came away," Haines lied bravely, "our people were sending out a new kind of patrol. We don't call them by that name, but they are death on submarines. That looks like one of them—if she is, she is half full of depth charges. Better get down under if you value my opinion."

Nekker turned on his seat and faced Haines.

"If I thought you would fool me," he snapped, "I shoot you dead in spite of my orders."

Haines rose at once. "You asked for my advice and I gave it," he snapped back. "It is no part of my business to warn you. Do as you will—I can swim."

He stood there quietly taking off his coat, then, finding the valve, he inflated his waistcoat. "May as well be ready," he threw out for those who could understand. The men in the Control stared.

He moved away in a thrilling silence, aware that no swimming would come of this encounter, but with the air of one who is prepared for all emergencies. And as he went Nekker's voice reached him.

"By God!" he growled, "I believe you are right."

He moved from the periscope as Haines glanced round.

"Starboard ninety degrees," said the voice again. "Go full speed . . . immerse to one hundred metres . . . uncharge bow tubes!" he barked finally to those who waited to fire.

Haines paused at the entrance to the engine-room. Across his arm his coat dangled. He turned round and saw the Commander lowering the periscope, saw that he glanced at his watch, that his eyes flickered, and knew he had won. It was a question of temperament—nothing more—and now Von Nekker had the jumps.

That, too, was unpleasant.

The Commander stood obviously listening for something which would unriddle this conundrum. If it came it would wreck all the delicate mechanism by which he and his men were surrounded. It would knock out the batteries which alone gave them power to move, to go up or down; to be anything, indeed, but a crammed box of tricks pulsing slowly until she reached that depth where water-pressure would crush her and drown all those who remained.

The noise made by men who obeyed orders in the bow impinged upon this, and again there was silence, the fuggy air, the tense waiting.

Those on duty in the Control watched their dials. One stood in the trap peeping down. Another crouched at the microphone, his head strapped as with black surgical bandages. Mutely he expressed the absence of new sounds, turning up his eyes, wagging his head, alert for the drone of propellers. A quartermaster bent over the small wheel, staring at a strange compass. Nekker glared at his wrist-watch, counting, methodical. Another, twisted by the voice pipes, stared at his Commander, motionless, like the wax effigy at a show. They waited as parts of the machine, dependent on the valiant Nekker, impressed by his swift reversal of all orders. It meant something, they knew not what. They seemed stunned, yet galvanized to obey. It might end at any moment by the roar which was annihilation. They stood there held by the grim silence, till a voice broke in with a shout. "One hundred metres!" it said, and there followed the whine of a valve.

A petty officer in charge of the manometer gave out the phrase with dry lips. A wheel span. Again came the whine of compressed air as the submarine hummed at her new level in a silence that was profound.

Von Nekker looked at his watch. He seemed to have been counting its beat ; the tip of his tongue made the circle of his lips—then he caught Haines' eyes.

"Nussing happen !" he said with sudden energy, glanced at the dials and turned to leave the Control. He gripped Haines' arm and stuttered out, "By God ! I want to sing . . . I thought he get us ! But we were too quick . . . too quick. Come an' have a drink."

He turned and gave with nasal insolence the order of a Prussian when addressing the Herd : "Keep her as she goes ! Half speed !"

Haines reflected that at all events he had saved one Tramp.

CHAPTER V

THE WHITE BOAT

U 59 dragged slowly to her base at Wilhelmshaven pounding on surface engines of the noisiest. Above her was the dim segment of a dead day, and circling her the purple sea-belt which cleft the world in twain. A star blinked high over the mast, silver against the farther heavens. A group glowed brightly in the darker east ; but the sector which fronted them was a starless vault, bizarre, luminous, where light plied her brushes behind barred clouds.

No gleam upon the horizon. Nothing alive but the stars and the blunt snout of the submarine churning diamonds from a sea which welled iridescent spume upon the plank-like superstructure. She moved humming to the north, her ridge-ropes taut, one mast erect, stanchions in place, all purple against the chrome which lingered still above the western belt of sea.

A whistle sounded, and instantly mast, stanchions and ridge-ropes returned to their slots like bars succumbing before a fire. The iridescence was intensified ; each slot became a playground of the wild, each ring and bolt a *point d'appui* for a phosphorescent whirl of green and blue and gold. No lights were visible from the deck, no sign of life. From near at hand the vessel loomed as a shadow limned in flame which rose and fell like the light which plays about Vesuvius when the mountain is asleep.

Haines stared out upon the northern seascape cognizant that each day brought him nearer home, nearer the moment when he must risk all or be content to remain quiescent till he reached the German base. His luck had been wonderful hitherto. Since leaving Torre del Fuero the Prussian snarler who ruled had developed so cousinly a regard that Haines could scarcely draw breath but Von Nekker was beside him to help expel it. Solitude was a thing of the past. Thought became impossible ; the co-ordination of plans drowned in a sea of chatter. Nekker required help, sustenance, and Haines providentially existed to give it. The man with the bayonet now rarely appeared, and in place of him came Nekker, cadaverous, patched, consumed by his fears.

They had crept up the coast from the south to the burden of these fears. Nekker was troubled by a miasma of new perils which hatched with their advance. These things were devised

by the Allies for his undoing, and now, as the submarine drew fire pictures in the darkness, he was afflicted by the last dread of all under-sea commanders.

He heard seaplanes droning over the Bay when in all truth the Allies had too few to patrol Dover Straits. He espied duck formations passing overhead when as yet they had not sufficient machines to guard the coast.

The futility of it troubled Haines. But it troubled him more to pose as the critic of events, sympathetic, of course, when his desire was for fighting. He loathed the part he was compelled to play and thought with swift retrospect of the spy-man who had shielded him. He felt at one moment that he must put an end to this deadliness; the next, drew hands over his safety waistcoat, acknowledging he must wait. There was nothing to which he could swim—no boat, no land, nothing; while as for seaplanes, he prayed one might alight in their track so that he could go to her and beg a passage home.

They drew near Ushant. Their course was laid to pass it a long way off, for the Commander was giving all headlands and their attendant patrols a wide berth. He had no stomach for adventures of the sort that had won him fame. Whether they would go up Channel and run the gauntlet of Dover Straits, or scramble through by the northern route, was still in the clouds. It depended, Von Nekker announced when Haines asked the question point-blank, on what was about in Channel. Then he went down to the wireless office, and Haines took exercise with others on the plank-like deck forward of the Control.

He visualized as he walked, Nekker sitting down, chatting with Berlin, as he termed it, picking up sister boats sneaking in the dark, and relaying messages to his Chiefs. He had been admitted to this room in a moment of expansion and had watched the process; but he had learned nothing of the strange code used. It was a jumble of letters, words and figures in groups, difficult to de-code and planned, as Nekker swore, to drive men silly. But Haines was untroubled by that phase. His thoughts as he moved up and down were concentrated on the installation so often idle and unguarded in the office. True, it was Telefunken, not Marconi; but he gathered it was operated in the same way. He remembered, too, that it might be useful now they were nearing Ushant.

Out there, somewhere, Jimmy steamed on patrol duty. Haines wondered if he could reach him. He had the call and would use

it if an opportunity occurred. He waited for that moment with leaping pulses.

"If you want me," said Jimmy, "remember 'I excel' . . . tap it out instead of your eternal S.O.S. If I'm within a couple of hundred of you, I'll trot along and give you a tow-rope."

Jag Haines had not forgotten. If he wished to escape a German prison and live again, he must get hold of Jimmy or some one able to slaughter U-boats. To do that he must find his way into the wireless room when Nekker was asleep. Perhaps he could drug him. He walked considering this. If he could make him drunk it could be done . . . again there came reaction—it would be impossible to make Nekker drunk.

He climbed into the conning-tower and stood beside the petty officer on watch, the phrase drumming—"I excel," or, as he would use it, "I.X.L.," a series of dots and dashes rapped out on a key. He played it staccato on the wind screen. Jove! it was smart of Jimmy to think of that . . . it would be possible to use it if they hauled in for the Channel. But where was Nekker? His talk with Berlin was of the longest.

Facing the dark night, hope inspiring him, Haines felt certain that Jimmy would be there to take it in. He would get hold of it . . . and if not, then the S.O.S. would bring some one racing to intercept them.

Thoughts came swiftly one upon the other; plans, hopes, but no fear. Fear is set far back from the mind of youth, and to-night it was out of court. Perhaps it was driven away by the radiance which wrapped them; by the kaleidoscopic change of black sea to translucent colour; by the electric touch that was in the air; the velvet dark. But most of all Haines thought, by the absence of that Prussian who cringed and talked of things and men that were vile. He felt that some one at Low Willows or the Rectory—Doretta, the Padre, Jimmy—was kneeling to pray for him; and the king who ruled the world had drawn their hearts together.

The notion thrilled him. He clasped his hands and closed his eyes shutting out the night, and prayed as men do who are face to face with death in battle—"God give me strength! . . . give me luck . . . help me! Help me . . . for Christ's sake. Amen."

And having prayed he felt calm.

That Nekker appeared close on the heels of his prayer seemed natural. In some way, Haines argued, they were all connected—

Doretta, the Padre, Jimmy, he himself—while Nekker with his nerves was the tractor which would draw them together.

At the moment the Commander was abject—a sinister personage impaled by circumstance. It appeared that orders had come which required him to run the gauntlet of Dover Straits. Incidentally, too, he was to intercept the smooth procession of a certain convoy—troopers, by God!—who were bound, he did not say where or whence, with destroyers by the dozen to guard them. . . . He who was crippled, understaffed, without help or officers, as they knew, and as Haines, if he had the acumen of a child, knew also. A ghastly stupidity! Did they want corpses for their damned vats when they reached home? He spluttered the thing out with a venom that stung. If they did not, then it seemed they were likely to get them. . . . Infantile! By God! he could cry. He would go through court-martial, if ever he reached home, rather than continue ziss life. He would resign; give them a chance to use him while he was fat. They wanted fat, it appeared, for their butter. God! The thing stank. They were all mad together . . . mad! Every soul of that *verdamnt* Higher Command was mad—perhaps they had eaten some of the butter! “Phit!” he snapped his fingers, “I am sick to death of the whole crowd.”

He raved for ten minutes on end, then snarled at the petty officer in charge, while U 59 headed subserviently for Channel.

Von Nekker, already three sheets in the wind, was on the verge of tears; Haines ready to sing as they moved off. As assistant navigator he suggested a tonic, with a look at the chart thrown in. In some way he felt that Nekker’s presence in Channel, or on the verge of it, was an insult the Admiralty would know how to avenge. “Brandy! you are right! I nearly forget!” It was a medicine of which Von Nekker was a judge. He approved. It brought tears where sometimes it brought laughter. “*Hoch!*”

Haines followed into the Commander’s cabin with a lightness he had not known for weeks—but of plans he had none.

“I want zat drink!” said Nekker as he threw himself down on the small settee. “I want it before I talk with Berlin—now I die if I not get it, like the baby in Pears’ Soap—say when!”

He uncorked a bottle and poured a liberal tot, in spite of Haines’ check. “Steady, Kommandant! Remember I am new to it.”

“It make you new,” Nekker bubbled.

He helped himself, added seltzer and drank at one draught ; filled again, set down his glass and lighted a cigarette. Then he puffed smoke and watched it ascend, watched till it was caught by the fan suction, whipped into strings and thrust out. He seemed to find the process illuminating. He smiled as he watched.

"Like a man's life," he jerked out, the smile extending. "Pulled in when it is strong and good, pushed out when it is useless. *Weltmacht oder neidergang!* All right for All-Highest . . . but," he shook a flabby cigarette, "we rule the world before ziss war. . . . The war kill our rule—Biff!" he lifted his glass. "Drink! Drink, for to-morrow we die . . . if not to-morrow, the day after." He suited action to the word and again his glass stood empty.

"Beginning to move," Haines smiled, content as chorus.

"Light a pipe!" roared Von Nekker, jocular at the notion. "Damned funny, what? Herr Kommandant and Herr Prisoner—*vis-à-vis* . . . foot on table—smash! What? After *zwei* goes at zat brandy . . . Drink up! Zat shows you what kind of stuff it is . . . not a headache in a bucketful. Must live—or all go mad togezzar."

He flung his cigarette across the cabin and sought to light another. His flamer refused swift service and he flung it after the cigarette—then instantly went on all fours, like a dog, to retrieve it. He cheered Haines to a like experiment, but the prisoner was a non-starter.

"Damn funny, that!" Nekker cackled, prancing. "Wonder what All-Highest War Lord say if he see that? Go blue in the face an' tell us it a disgrace to his damned uniform—nussing more certain than that!" he commented.

Haines tempered his replies to the situation. He was shameless, a toady and sycophant in one; ready if occasion demanded it with quip or repartee; but Nekker gave him scant opportunities to test his powers. He held the stage. Of course, it was obvious he had taken wine before that; but he was not drunk. One could not say readily when that stage appeared with Nekker. It was the man's nerve that was debauched. He trembled considering the task that confronted him. His teeth chattered. He had control neither of speech nor muscle, and sought by a rough bonhomie to hide the thing from Haines' steadier gaze.

He talked at random, switching from one subject to another, but always came back to his ordeal, as he termed it; to his life of hazard, the stealthy conditions of his existence—"sneaking

about the world, by God ! to shoot down crows, cows—anything you like that is unable to fight.” He was weary of it and desired peace. He would like a sleep, but his responsibilities were enormous. They weighed him down. In the old days he was strong and could endure shocks—scarcely knew what they were ; but now he was flabby as a bath towel, limp as a stocking drawn over the hand of a woman for repairs. Did Haines comprehend what that meant ? He doubted it. “ You English are so slow, so cold, one cannot imagine you comprehend. . . . Few could—Piff ! ” The bare notion made him smile. He wept instead, churning out tears and chatter with a simplicity that amazed. He had no reserves. Everything was on the surface, bubbling, insistent.

“ Look at this thing ! ” He pulled out a chart of the Channel and thumped it flat upon the small table. “ We are here.” He dabbed with his fist at a square and picked up compasses. “ That is our track. We came up here to look about, get some air and charge our batteries. That was three hours ago. We come on that course . . . so—and are here . . . One hundred and fifty miles west of Ushant. Nothing between us and the Irish Sea. Safe ! ” He announced the condition with a bang. “ And now we go here, where they have nets and other devil-traps to catch us. . . . ” His eyes flickered at the prospect. “ Ever been caught in a net down under . . . know what it’s like to rip and cut your way through, while swinging mines bob at you and try to send you to Hell ? No ? But I have. And I tell you there is no other Hell . . . that is *It*. You are blind as a mole in a burrow. You see strings of wire and damned entanglements from the scuttles. You cannot reach them, you must do that with your nose—with which you see nothing—nothing. But there you see a maze of wire and chain scraping about you, fish squirming past, dim things with horns which, if you touch, will blow you smaller than the fishes . . . fling you out of this damned shell you are in, for them to feed on . . . and you hear—*Ach !* the devilish rattle and ping of the thing as you cut your way through, wriggle perhaps more deep in the net and you know—you may go out with a bang while you look . . .

“ You feel the hellish gasping that comes to a man who drowns, understand what he feels, how he fights . . . and it all goes on and on and on, for days and years while you grew white and old. Then you come up and find nothing has happened ! That makes it worse. . . . It proves what a fool you have been, how easily your hair stirs . . . *Ach !* there are no words for this. You cannot

explain these things, the tingle that is in your veins, the flush that comes to your brain, the twanging that goes on in your arms, your knees ; you only know it is there, that imprisonment is torture, blindness torture, lack of knowledge of what is in front of you the torture of the damned . . .

"You know *the end* is in front of you, there where all is blind groping ; that every movement you make is likely to be your last—and you feel it," he leaned forward screeching the phrase, "feel the shock that will blow you into a jelly . . . feel it in your hair, down your spine, through your finger-tips . . . and you are cold, *Ach !* cold with coldness of a corpse while you sweat and great tears trickle down from your arm-pits. . . ."

He ceased and sat staring.

The submarine lurched suddenly, a gong sounded and Nekker stood.

Something scraped alongside, bobbing, uncertain of touch. Nekker's hand dropped. He glanced over his shoulder, expecting the end, collision with a net, a mine. His jaw fell. Haines was on his feet in a moment and moving towards the door ; but Nekker forestalled him, pushed him aside and sprang for the Control. Haines followed as far as the passage, then stood listening. The noise, whatever it had been, no longer troubled. He heard shouts instead. The steward hurried past carrying a life-belt. "Somesing 'appen !" he chanted, and was gone in the wake of his Commander.

Haines passed through the engine-room and entered the Control. The way was blocked with scrambling men. He caught sight of the steward and seized him by the shoulder. "What is it ?" he shouted. A swift dialogue ensued between this man and a petty officer, and at the end of it the steward reported, "A boat sare Captain, run down and anuzzer near by—close, full of dead mens."

"Dead, eh ? Torpedoed crew, I suppose."

The steward could not say.

Haines turned and moved towards the cabin. "I will get a coat," he interjected. "It will be cold up there."

To speak by the book, he had no intention to waste time searching out horrors now that the opportunity for which he had striven was before him. Now he would act.

He came to the door of the wireless room and glanced in. It was open far enough for him to see that the operator had vanished with the rest. From the Control came the shouts of men who

might have been fighting for their lives ; but Haines knew that he was listening to the German method of hailing those whom the Pale One had taken to his bosom. He heard jeers, laughter, the braying of a megaphone which ended in the crow of a cock, monstrous as a sign of frayed nerves—then he sat down at a tiny table and fumbled with strange tools.

A board lay before him studded with knobs and buttons and switches. A twisted hank of wires came in from a hole radiating vicariously, as it seemed, from beyond. The switches were of brass and copper and vulcanite ; on the table lay an open book, some pieces of paper, a pencil attachment and the key on which messages were sent.

Haines' knowledge of wireless was slight. He knew the difference between Marconi and a Telefunken note ; knew something of wave-lengths and how to get Poldhu, Eiffel Tower, Nordeich and the rest ; how to set the dial to resolve the drone of aerial talk into definite speech.

He slipped into the receiver, and instantly the whine and buzz of ghostly voices began ; but it was louder than he had expected. He was unprepared for the fact that the sea is a swifter medium than the air, a submarine more efficient as a sounding board. For a moment he felt afraid. There was so much going on, so many questions and answers—and they all seemed close. He glanced over his shoulder, astonished. He was surrounded by voices, all of them whining, singing, buzzing like a hive of giant bees disturbed in the sunshine. They sounded angry, impatient—and doubtless were.

The dial troubled him, too ; it was Telefunken and he could not read it. But there were marks on it which meant stations, and he must tune by guess—twist, twist, nothing less.

He was seated in the wireless office of an enemy submarine groping with strange instruments, listening to the jangle of voices calling from many lands—some in despair, some with cheers. France, perhaps, telling of a set-back in the silver tones of Eiffel Tower ; a little destroyer registering her exit ; Poldhu gruffly joining in ; Clifton or Admiralty itself passing orders to the Fleet. Bewildering ! But fascinating, and near at hand were the jeers or cries of a U-boat's crew engaged in God knew what devilry.

But he dared give no thought to that. It was essential to resolve the buzz of aerial mockery ringing in his ears, to set a period to imaginings. He turned the dial and caught the call of

a U-boat relaying a message perhaps to Von Nekker. He could not read it. Immaterial! He turned again and again, hearing always in outlandish phrasing the voice of a world at war, crying out perhaps for succour, perhaps for a case of soap, all in code—unintelligible without the key. Then with a new essay for light came a gruff note Morseing a message from some ship. He could not read it, but he was in touch with friends. Instantly, he leaned over the keyboard.

"I.X.L.", he tapped out. "Latitude 48° 12' N. Long. 8° 42' W. Heading E.N.E., 15 knots . . . I.X.L. . . . I.X.L."

He adjusted the receiver and listened, his eye sidelong on the door. Voices came to him questioning, commenting—"Right you are . . . I.X.L. What is I.X.L.? What code are you using?"

So—he had not reached his brother. Haines flushed in spite of the strain. "I am I.X.L.", he explained in Morse. "Prisoner in U-boat. Relay to *Chanticleer* if she's out. They will know."

"Right-o!" came back. "We're on."

What they were on or who was on, were puzzles Haines could not read, but he dared risk no further experiments. He replaced the receiver, turned back the dial and crept into the alley-way, hot from two causes, the sweat trickling down to blind him.

The ragged noise of cheering drifted back to him as he came near the engine-room. Perhaps something approached. He could not tell. In any case, scare no longer troubled those who clustered at the exit. He went back to the wireless and again gave the call his brother had suggested, but this time alternately with the S.O.S.

Strings of chatter came to encourage him, all helpful, all bidding him keep in touch; but this was impossible. He said so in crisp speech, then left the office satisfied it was unwise to remain longer. He marvelled at his luck, telling himself it was obvious something was going on on deck, something entrancing, seeing all hands were away. Some piper had piped, and the rats were scuffling in his train.

He came through the engine-room where men were in place at the valves; but farther forward, at the ladder by which one mounted to the conning-tower, Haines could see the legs of a group of men all wedged upon the rungs; men who still strove to climb but could not; who desired to see this fresh evidence of *der frisch fröhliche Krieg* and could see only in glimpses. Shouts of laughter came down from the deck.

Obviously something amusing was in hand. The Germans guffawed.

Haines plucked at the legs of a sailor, shouting, "Get down or get up," and the man turned with a grin to make room.

The submarine was going astern when Haines reached the conning-tower and looked out, but Nekker was in his element. Haines scarcely gripped anything instantly; he was half blind; his mind alert, but under the influence of his wireless struggle. Still, presently he could see a boat. It looked so weird that his attention was riveted at once. It reminded him of a scene on the stage—white against a dark screen, the limelight in full play. It was the submarine's searchlight that produced this illusion. It made a picture so vivid that Haines could see nothing else. The boat looked unlike anything he had ever seen before—Charon-esque, a boat of the dead, perhaps; he could not tell. The light was unsteady. They were drawing away. He turned, saw the steward and called him with a nod.

"What are they doing?" he asked.

"Kommandant try to sink 'er, but 'ee only make 'ole," he sniggered.

"Sink her——?"

He turned round. The crack of a revolver rang in his ears, and following it came a German guffaw. That stung; but he was still uncertain, the steward among those who laughed.

Haines turned again to the boat. She was a ship's lifeboat, white, high-sided, clinker-built, probably British. He saw that her bow was stove in, that there was something in her stern-sheets. And Nekker was trying to sink her with bullets! No!—or had he essayed to ram? A shot rang out again.

Haines stared. He glanced round and said in his best German, "At what are they shooting?" And the sailor, appreciating his difficulty, gave back, "Ze crew-mans not all dead . . ."

Then Haines understood. He became strangely confused in spite of that. His face and neck grew hot—he tried to speak, but no sound came. His eyes, straining to see, for some reason failed him. He leaned forward. A confused buzz was in his ears—like the chime of that aerial talk! Then came another crack from Nekker's automatic; infantile, stupid, and Haines' voice made way—"Play the game!"

In his own ears it sounded strong, threatening; but Nekker merely twisted, caught sight of him and waved his left hand.

"You?" he shouted. "Come down and see me make bull's-eye. . . . Starboard hard. Full speed ahead!"

The pistol cracked on the word.

Haines obeyed as the submarine began to twist. He leaped to the fore deck making a great effort to protest; but again for some reason no words came. The men watched him as he went. He seemed to be in a great hurry, but they, knowing his condition of practical freedom, made no attempt to hold him. They stood back to enable him to pass—it was all of a piece with this glimpse of *der frisch fröhliche Krieg*—and in a second Haines was beside Nekker. He gripped his wrist, wrenching the pistol from his hand. Still he was speechless. He lifted his arm and struck Nekker with the butt. "By God! I wouldn't have believed it!"

This escaped his lips as the Kommandant reeled. Wouldn't have believed what? Asinine! A growl reached his ears. Haines released his hold and turned to confront those who came. He snapped the trigger facing them, but it refused. Empty! Take it! He flung it at the nearest face, saw it strike and leaped aside. Nekker, he noticed as he passed, was sitting against a stanchion, clapping his face. Blood streamed from between his fingers. He lay over groaning. But Haines had no time to consider Nekker; he climbed the wire and leaped into the sea. Until he touched water he did not know that he had leaped.

The submarine continued her wild sweep to port, immobile, fixed, ready at man's orders to persist in her gyroscopic career while fuel remained.

CHAPTER VI

THE WIRELESS ROOM

THE mournful gulls crying of an impending gale swirled screaming over the adjacent fields. Beneath the pent sky breakers charged white-lipped to demolish a barrier which for long ages had smiled at similar assaults. St Anthony, just across the harbour, threw alternate flashes of red and white upon a wilderness which quaked, became opaque and cleared, all in the swift gleam of an occultation.

Dinner was over, and the sitting-room which held Dorothea, the Rector and Sir Douglas shook in sympathy with the pounding seas. A Marine entered, placed the coffee-table before Dorothea and withdrew. It seemed very homelike before that blazing fire ; only the presence of Marines broke the spell, whispered of the war and drew attention to the gale. The girl shivered slightly, and Sir Douglas moved a screen to shield her. "Cold?" he asked.

"No—some one walking over my grave," she smiled back. "One or two lumps?" She held poised sugar-tongs. "How the wind booms!"

"Two, if you will. Never mind the wind. We are exposed here."

As he spoke came a knock, followed at once by the Admiral's servant. He held it wide, announced, "Commander Haines," and retired.

Jimmy, clad in Service kit, his face whipped by the wind, crossed and made his salaams. "Sorry to interrupt you, sir," he said, and to the others, "You look jolly comfortable all of you."

"But we are not," the Admiral joked. "As a matter of fact, we were discussing the origin of gales. Sit down, my dear boy, while you may."

"I haven't a moment, sir," Jimmy explained. "I am just here with orders to take Dorothea to the Base." He turned to her. "Admiral's compliments, and will you come? I have the car."

She stirred in her chair, her cheeks paling. "Now?" she asked.

"If you can."

"Of course." She rose unsteadily, glanced at him and said, "Not bad news, is it?"

"Lord! no," he replied, and knowing Jimmy she hastened to prepare,

He returned from closing the door and sat a moment on the arm of his father's chair, saying in answer to the ex-Sea Lord :

"As far as I know, sir, there is a wireless coming in. Picked up, I believe. I am under orders to get to sea directly . . ."

"Um !" Sir Douglas growled. "I suppose it isn't a message from your brother by chance ?"

"Absolutely I don't know what it is, sir. I doubt it. I think I'll get down and wait for her in the lounge. We will keep you posted. . . . Good night, Dad." He touched his father's hand and vanished.

Downstairs the two met, and on their way down the drive Jimmy again assured Dorothea it was all O.K. Then, as they gathered speed, "By the way, I shall be outside before you get back to bed. Fact is I'm to command the Squad to-night . . . yes—I had to tell you that. It's not swank. Wish me luck, won't you ?"

"Rather. Oh ! but how ripping for you. I am proud. Why didn't you tell us just now—and Sir Douglas ?"

"No good at that sort of thing, Lady Dorothea. He'll hear fast enough if I play the goat."

"Oh ! but you won't—you couldn't."

"Never can tell," came from the straight lips, then silence until they drew near the sentries ; Jimmy thrashing out a speech he never would make, which Dorothea would hate to hear, which would tell her in a sentence why he was "the miserablest blighter in the Service," and end in sending him out with self-contempt for companion until, in the fullness of time, an enemy shell or his own revolver finished the business. That is how Jimmy put the matter in his mind. Fine phrases scarcely appealed to him. Was he not content with a tabloid speech, which after all expressed just what he desired to say ? The trouble for Jimmy was that on occasion matters cropped up which could not be put in words. Well—that, too, was with Joss.

Dorothea interrupted this just as they came to a halt before a sentry who stood ready. "Do you think," she asked, "whether by any chance the message comes from Jag ?"

And Jimmy's answer—while there hummed a curious threnody in his brain which sang on and on, "Lucky Jag . . . lucky, lucky Jag !" came in the usual terms, definite, precise—"I shouldn't advise you to bank on that. He'll turn up when it's time to hole out—but this . . . well, it's Telefunken, and it's rotten to wake up and find you've put your money on the wrong horse."

They alighted ; Jimmy a little flustered, Dorothea calm—illusions slowly dying. He found her a chair in the anteroom and passed inside.

Admiral Sheldon looked up as he entered. "Ah ! here you are. Brought Miss Nesbit ? Good ! Now read this." He pushed a paper across the table which Jimmy took up. "Decoded from the intercepted Telefunken," said the Admiral. "Apparently from U 59. I am getting her fixed off on chance."

Jimmy read, commenting as he did so, "Seems about fed up, sir—no officers, planes damaged, compelled to travel on the surface—ordered to intercept convoy leaving Plymouth on the 2nd. . . . God ! I should like to know where they get their information. . . ."

"The coast is alive with spies," the Admiral reminded.

"And he bucks at the job," Jimmy smiled.

"Hence the splutter of Telefunken and our knowledge of his whereabouts," Sheldon explained.

Jimmy returned the paper. "I propose to bag our sick friend," the Admiral resumed. "Look at the chart. He was here at 9.30. I have been fozzled ever since . . . but here is his course and speed. Not so bad for a lame duck ! Meanwhile J 54 and X 42 will act under you. It will be your first run as a squadron commander. See what you can do with it and keep me informed."

Jimmy straightened his back. Rumour had not lied. His eyes brightened. "You make me very proud, sir . . . and the night's right for the Hunters. I'll do my best."

He moved to the door, the Admiral accompanying him. "It will be a feather in your cap if you bring it off," said the Chief. "Your papers shall follow. Meanwhile get ready to slip."

"Very good, sir."

Jimmy vanished from the office. He said *au revoir* to Dorothea as he passed and made his way up the pier. Rain blinded him. A moment since he had expressed himself satisfied with the night. Now he was less sure.

The girl sat before the fire in the anteroom. She leaned back in her chair content to obey orders as Jimmy or his brothers obeyed them. She was sufficiently aware of Naval methods to admit that some things were neither for her sight nor her ears. Really she was not interested in fizz-bangs—which was the term she found for the wireless splutterings which went on somewhere not far away. She was tired, and the fire hot. They had given

her a book of photographs to consider, and presently she dozed over them. Something was whining high over head, something else seemed to hum . . . wireless, no doubt. For a long time she sat still aware of these sounds. She closed her eyes on them—then for a space nothing troubled her. She rested, indeed, as had seemed impossible throughout this tension.

After a while a voice disturbed her, repeating a phrase which had troubled her for hours. It said, "Sorry to wake you, Miss Nesbit." Then louder, "Miss Nesbit! Miss Nesbit!"

She opened her eyes and glanced around. The Admiral and his Flag Lieutenant were gathered near. She started and said, "I'm afraid I was dozing. Did you call?" Then, with swift apology as the situation dawned on her, "I beg your pardon, Admiral . . . I'm afraid I was asleep."

"You were," he laughed, while Flags joined in. "The best thing you could do . . . and I am puzzled. In fact, I think you may be able to help us. We have had several messages and the last is so easy yet so obscure, that I must put you on your honour and seek your help. I think it may concern you more than anyone else—so you see . . ."

"You mean that it is from Captain Haines?" she pleaded, begging for plain speech.

"I cannot say that. I don't want to raise hopes which may not be realized . . . you give your word, of course?"

"Absolutely . . . please don't keep me!"

She came near, flushed and dewy with sleep as a child just taken from its cot, as the Admiral unfolded a paper.

"Here is a message we picked up a while ago. It comes from a prisoner in a U-boat. There is just a possibility it may be Captain Haines . . . but——"

"Yes. I see that——"

"He says, 'I.X.L. Latitude 48° 12' North,' in code, of course. 'Longitude 8° 42' West. Heading E.N.E. Fifteen knots. I.X.L. I.X.L.' Now, I.X.L. is the difficulty. We asked what code he was using, and got a reply which said, 'I am I.X.L., prisoner in U-boat. Relay to *Chanticleer* if she is out. They will know.' After that came I.X.L. and S.O.S. many times repeated. Since then nothing. *Chanticleer*, you remember, is refitting. All her gear down."

"Yes, yes, I understand," Dorothea broke in swiftly. "But you've forgotten Jimmy, Commander Haines, was in the *Chanticleer* when Jag sailed—Jag is Captain Haines. Isn't it possible

that it is some word the brothers arranged between themselves ? Of course, I'm only guessing."

The Flag Lieutenant shaped his lips to whistle, but no sound came.

"I sent a message to *Chanticleer* at once," the Admiral pursued, "but they know nothing there."

"But Jimmy is not on her . . . might it not be a quite private word between the two ?"

"It may be. All sorts of tricks come to light in these days. I could ask, but don't think that course advisable." Then, with a word of apology, the C-in-C. drew apart taking Flags with him. Dorothea returned to her chair. She had detected a note of anxiety in the Admiral's manner as he answered her question. Her thoughts were so occupied with Jag that she failed to remember that Jimmy remained in the picture. The two men were consulting in low tones over there within the holy of holies. Deep voices reached her in a rolling jumble of sound, words which might mean life or death to her lover. She was possessed by this. The mystery of these letters which no one could interpret must be connected with Jag—Jag who in his capacity as a Cinderella-man was so amazingly alert that Admiral Sheldon made no secret of his admiration.

She looked round and saw the Admiral moving up and down alone. He seemed flustered. From overhead came the click and splutter of wireless reporting further blows, the hammer-like blows of a world-war for which no man was responsible. She rose, unable to remain longer inactive. The two officers came towards her, and she heard the Flag Lieutenant say, "There is nothing else for it, sir," in the tones of one who persuades.

She broke in upon that, saying swiftly as she came near, "I can bear anything if I know the truth—anything! anything!"

Her slight form seemed to dilate and become heroic with the words. She seemed to personify the English people who stood up pleading to know the truth—the truth which long ago they had refused to hear and now was drowned in a flood of words.

The C-in-C. joined at once. "Sometimes, dear lady, it is not possible to speak, but in this case I think it best. You desire it. Please come, then, and I will explain——"

He took her arm and led her within the holy of holies, Flags accompanying him. He leaned against the table. Behind him was the chart, spread out. On it were parallel rulers, compasses and a thing with three legs hinged over an arc cut with minute

lines, which Dorothea knew meant degrees. There were also pencils and rubber.

"If what you suggest as the explanation of I.X.L. is the correct solution, we are face to face with this—The message comes from the U-boat young Haines has gone out to destroy. Position, course, speed," he touched the chart, "all point to that. If I.X.L. happens to be his brother, the matter becomes complicated. You see that, of course?"

Dorothea shivered as she answered, "I can't help seeing it." Her hands were clenched, the knuckles standing out white and drawn, as she dug with her nails at the palms. "What can be done?" she added, her face pale as they had never seen it. "Is there anything you can do . . . please do not mince words."

"As a matter of fact, Miss Nesbit, we must destroy the U-boat."

In spite of the shock Dorothea experienced, she stood her ground, swaying a little, but calm. She said, "But not without warning. . . . Surely you will give Captain—Haines the chance to escape before you . . . you fire?"

The Admiral watched her. "British, to the backbone!" That was his thought; but he said, as gently as he could, "If I warned Commander Haines that there are prisoners on board, presumably one of them his brother, I should handicap Commander Haines."

"How?"

"By giving the U-boat the chance he no doubt would take of sinking Commander Haines' boat with all hands. That is inevitable."

Dorothea lifted her hands as though she strove to shut out the sight. She stood thus a minute, then uncovered her face and said softly:

"Please tell me whether Jimmy can pick up this message from the U-boat?"

"Undoubtedly."

Dorothea's eyes contracted. She seemed to be looking out through the side of the room—far, far out. She stood quite still, her hands still raised, a glow on her face; and slowly there came a smile and with it the words:

"In that case I can leave it to Jimmy, for he will know if I.X.L. is Jag."

"Quite," said Admiral Sheldon. "As a matter of fact, it is just one of those facts an Admiral does not wish to know."

CHAPTER VII

“ DEO VOLENTE ”

H.M.S. T.B.D. K 89, otherwise *Swallow*, had lately come round from Laird's for duty in the chops of the Channel. Since her arrival she had moved up and down the blue-green seas which screen Scilly, Lizard, Falmouth, and as a new-comer had taken note of The Manacles, Wolf, the island of La Vierge and the Côtes du Nord as far as St Malo.

And now, with Jimmy Haines in command, she was sizzling on a duty stunt in the usual way. That is to say, she was rolling a little, spilling water a little, drawing a most excellent wake and disturbing the fishes. Astern were J 54 and X 42, both engaged in the task of Station Keeping.

The night was dark but clear. Visibility perhaps a mile, wind fresh from the sou'-west. There were no lights about, nothing to flurry the most irritable Commander. Even our untameable Merchantmen, if Jimmy was to be credited, seemed to have got the hang of things at last. If they were in the neighbourhood, they steamed without sidelights or masthead lamp—a factor of some portent. It appeared likely they had heard of that U-boat from the south which Scilly had caught spluttering in wireless, and knew that with the assistance of Falmouth and Start she was fixed for slaughter—*Deo volente*.

On the bridge at ten o'clock, Jimmy frowned over a W/T just sent up by the decoding officer. “I.X.L.”, he said to the messenger, “what is I.X.L.?”

“Not in the book, sir.”

“Not in the book, eh? Curious. Ask the Paymaster to look again.”

The messenger saluted and vanished. Jimmy marched alone, the letters drumming as he walked. He halted behind the screen and re-read the whole message, one intercepted as they drove at full speed through the black night. “I.X.L.”, it said. “Lat. 48° 12' North. Long. 8° 42' West. Heading E.N.E., 15 knots. I.X.L., I.X.L.”

Again he walked. There was a familiar ring in those letters; but he could not place them. He paused and called the navigator, giving him the message. “Work out this position for me, Bradley. Never mind anything else, and let me know how it comes in with the U-boat's as soon as you can.”

Again Jimmy marched his short beat—up and down, staring into the dark. The sea curled up, slapping at the bow and

sending spray high over the bridge. K 89 drove on unhindered, vibrating all through her dim shape. The mast cut the blackness with quick, short arcs; the delicate wires of the aerial sang unerringly their song; but Jimmy heeded none of these things, he was concerned with letters which danced always to evade capture, recurred, beckoned—for ever on the verge of discovery.

The messenger returned and handed in his answer brought from the fuggy atmosphere of the Paymaster's cabin. There were two papers. One said, "No I.X.L. in any code we carry"; the other, "Intercepted message from Base asking the meaning of I.X.L."

Jimmy digested this and tucked the paper in the pocket of his oilskin. He pushed the question from his mind. If the Base couldn't decode, why bother? Other matters pressed. The wind seemed to be getting up. The night no longer pricked with stars. The visibility had dwindled perhaps to half a mile, and K 89 with her attendant shadows were at full speed, crossing that half-mile in something less than sixty seconds. Jimmy Haines was not considering this. He was in command of the Duty-trot squadron and intent on finding Fritz before Fritz had time to put him in the ditch.

Bradley returned from studying his chart. He came up beside Haines and said, "The position is the same, roughly, as that given by the Base. It undoubtedly comes from the U-boat."

"That simplifies matters, but it doesn't explain I.X.L.," said Jimmy.

Number One agreed. They stood a little apart staring over the screen. Again, after a while, came a messenger from the decoding officer, and Jimmy took the paper and read.

"Intercepted message to Base," it said tersely, "runs as follows—'I am I.X.L., prisoner in U-boat. Relay to *Chanticleer*. They will know.' This again followed by 'I.X.L., and S.O.S.'"

Jimmy stood quite still considering this. It awakened his interest in I.X.L. It provided a new train of thought. In a flash he connected up as he would have said: "Relay to *Chanticleer*. They will know." What would they know? Who of all *Chanticleer's* crew could explain the puzzle except Jimmy Haines himself? Not one.

He stood so long staring out at the opaque wall they faced that the messenger fidgeted and his Commander turned round to give him his dismissal. "Thank you," he said. "Ask the Paymaster to keep me in touch with any fresh news."

The messenger saluted and escaped the wet bridge. Commander Haines stared after him with the look of one who sees through him, sees through the screens and darkness far into the world of shadows which lies beyond.

"Of course it's Jag," he said as the sprays drove over him. "Prisoner in a U-boat . . . the one we are after . . . Good God ! That puts the lid on . . . Jag ! " Then after a while, "Poor old Jag ! "

He moved back to the wing of the bridge while his thoughts flicked amidst the tossed-out badinage which must end to-night. "I excel ! " Again, "If you are in a hot corner and want help," something of that sort, "rap that out instead of your eternal S.O.S. Rap it out. . . . If I am within a hundred of you I'll give you a tow-rope . . . I excel, eh ? God ! And Jag had made it I.X.L. . . . downy ! Just like poor old Jag."

Then his thoughts switched away to Dorothea sitting where he left her in the anteroom of the holy of holies, the Admiral smiling at his promptness in bringing her. Cheek ! Well—that was how one holed out on the last green a winner. A man takes his chances as they come ; only a fool throws them away, walks round with peradventures and crawls home a loser. Jimmy's training had been for action, not argument ; swift obedience, not talk. That was why he was in command of a Duty-trot squad, buzzing through black darkness to get at Fritz. . . . But Jag was in this business, too ; Jag who had bagged a U-boat without aid of gun or torpedo—simply by the use of his ship's nose. Damned good medicine, too—probably the best—and if Jag were there, what could be done ? Couldn't ram if his brother were stowed away somewhere in the old sardine box. Lord ! what a jim-jam business . . . Dorothea behind it all . . . waiting for Jag, praying for Jag . . . living for him——

Still—there were his orders. "U 59 bound up Channel to destroy convoy leaving on the 2nd. Intercept U 59. Sink her. It will be a feather in your cap if you do ! "

Of course—but what about Jag ?

Jimmy Haines moved to the compass and looked in. He re-crossed to his old position beside Bradley and said in a detached voice :

"That last message puts the lid on. . . . Some poor devil—I.X.L., I suppose—is prisoner on this U-boat of ours." He spoke as though this, at all events, were certain and would some day be recorded in letters which no longer burned. "How he

managed to get at the wireless will be interesting. . . . Makes it awkward for us, though."

"Rotten," Number One conceded. "Can't very well fire on a craft holding some of our people, sir; and the stem's worse."

"Everything's worse. It's a devil of a jumble . . . but we're going to stop her. That's definite."

He marched the bridge sunk in thought, but observant, alive to every little detail of his command. High up, stars blinked over them, and again were gone. The bow wave turned crisply on both sides, trailing away in blobs of fire on either beam to concentrate in a wake which pulsed fire.

Few men go into action without a fluttering of pulses. Jimmy had heard of an Admiral who sought to place his flagship where the shells were falling, who was irritable when they were not falling within a few hundred feet; but Jimmy Haines was incredulous. He called it eyewash. He was as likely to go in search of cold feet as hot shells. Especially was this so now that Dorothea had come into his life and Jag was perhaps laid out for tampering with wireless in this U-boat.

Curious how thoughts come. For half an hour or more Jimmy had been in possession of a message which told him Jag was prisoner; yet only now had the sequence come to him. Perhaps the thought was born of the cessation of news.

Jimmy stood quite still considering this. It was a new angle. If Jag had been caught, then certainly he would be dead now. Inevitable! Poor Dorothea! After all this waiting . . . well, she would be heart-broken. No use disguising that. Poor old Jag! Plucky to the last. It would take some nerve, when you came to think of it, to attempt wireless from a U-boat. . . . Where in the world were the operator, the crew, Commander, guards—all the paraphernalia of discipline as it certainly existed in the U-boats? All gone to glory if Jag got through with his job. Well—such things happen.

He looked at the matter with the knowledge of an expert. If discipline existed, Jag would have gone west. Not the smallest doubt about that. And if Jag had been knocked out, the Commander of K 89 could let drive at sight, sink the damned pest and get back a bit of his own . . . the Navy's own. That is what he had been sent out to do. But how could he make sure? And if he risked it, what could he say to Dorothea when she faced him as presently she would?

Jimmy Haines leaned his sou'-westered head against a

stanchion and felt the cool iron at his forehead. He was not sure whether his head ached or whether it burned. His eyes throbbed ; but that was from staring into the night, from the spray which curved over them, from the use of binoculars . . . but his head ! He felt confused, uncertain what he must do.

He called to Bradley, a dim shadow near the wheel, and said, " Let me know our position at six bells . . . what time is it now ? "

" Ten-forty, sir. At our present speed we shall be thirty-eight miles from the U-boat at six bells. I ran it out just now."

" Good—and her bearing ? "

" S. 67° W."

Jimmy Haines moved to the compass, opened the slide and glanced in. " Nearly on end," he commented. Then going back to the wing, " How does that work out with *our* bearings ? "

" Within two miles, sir."

" Right-o ! Make a signal to alter course ten degrees south."

Again he stood alone, his uncertainty troubling him.

Deo volente !

Stay, was that true ? Could anyone say definitely that God willed things—war, for instance, submarines . . . Jag a prisoner—and then stood aside while others faced the issue ? He smiled. Good enough for the dear Padre, if you like ; but for a naval officer driving into this slithering sou'-west swell and within a few minutes of the moment when guns and torpedoes would come into play—not quite.

It was the Padre who had made use of the phrase—and now it recurred. On his lips it had a fine ring. He believed it. If Jimmy could have believed it, too, his path would have been plain. Whatever he did, provided he did not play the coward, would be right. Whether he fired on sight or waited and tried to wheedle the U-boat commander into giving up Jag before they set to . . . Drivel ! How could he do that ? How could he begin ? Why, if he waited after sighting the beast he would be scuppered, every soul of them in the ditch . . .

Number One came near to speak. He seemed to be obsessed by the same trouble. He turned his back to the wind and said quietly :

" I shouldn't be surprised if this new dodge of taking skippers of torpedoed ships prisoner isn't a scheme of Fritz to prevent us ramming on sight."

" Very little doubt about that."

" Then that settles it, sir . . . we shall have to hold our fire ? "

"Exactly. Rough luck, what? The squad will have to grin while they try to pot us. Prettiest bit of plotting I've come across—botched!" said the Commander.

"Perhaps I.X.L. has managed to put his guns and torpedoes out of action," Bradley smiled.

"Tall order if he has . . . Oh! damn . . . what's the use of thinking?"

Number One crossed over to starboard, his tongue in his cheek. Aft him was the chief yeoman standing by, Morse graven on his brain. Close at hand the switches and levers with which he worked, more distant the loom of the coxswain bending over his wheel. The watch was drawing to an end, but without bell or bugle to mark its passage. K 89 was like a shadow caught on a screen, palpitating, slopping at the seas, but silent, without voice—black, a ship of the dead.

The crew no longer slept. They stood at stations ready for instant action; still some of them, yawning, swearing others. Neither officer could see them, and the breeze came up charged with moisture from the old quarter—sou'-west. Lord! how sick they were of it, of the long-drawn wait and the stealthy game of trailing skirts. To-morrow half a gale would be raving up Channel and the squadron drenched to the eyes. But there might not be a to-morrow. No sweet dalliance on the Castle Drive when night had fallen, no peeps at St Mawes across the glinting harbour, no leave . . . no leave-taking . . .

True. But those who thought had no notion of posing as prophets; while those who had no use for thought were content to remember it was still possible to smoke.

Eleven-five . . . eleven-fifteen—the hiss of their seething track the only sound.

Time buzzed now! Good!—let it slide. Shells in the racks, gun-layers sitting on little iron saddles, torpedoes ready. . . . Not far from here poor old *Formidable* had been caught and scuppered. The luck of the devil! Without so much as a bark, without a glimpse of the beggar who did the trick—just a red, tearing crash and the seas rolled *sans* her weight . . .

Haines came to the engine-room voice-pipe and spoke into it. A message blinked from behind a screen to the squadron . . . "Fifteen knots"—that was the meaning of it. Heigho! Rather less than half speed. . . . Well, the skipper knew his job—and there was an end of that. The squadron would take a bit of

hitting even at fifteen knots. Besides, you couldn't go racing down on your objective without telling listeners you were on the way.

Science was the curse of modern war. Chaps sitting with their ears glued to microphones . . . all those Professor Johnnies with their new-fangled gadgets to trip you up. A man could do nothing but what some other fellow, lying doggo, if you please, knew of it. Fighting! Well—if you cared to give it the old name no one would jump on you—but! Sneaking about in rubbers like a policeman tracking a burglar—chaps who carried jemmies that knocked you out before you could blink. What price a drink? Two blighted seconds and all over. Well—it was a clean death, rather different, when you came to think of it, for those poor devils of Merchantmen who got chucked into boats in mid-ocean, the row home facing them . . . the call of home, some of 'em wounded, too. God! that was the limit.

Again Jimmy Haines gave an order which set the squadron sweeping in column of line abreast. Strung out thus they covered a wide area; but in the darkness no semblance of line appeared. The seas creamed past flinging spume, washing at the tubes as the vessels rolled.

There came a voice from the wing where the yeoman of signals stood:

"Something out there, sir—about a point to starboard."

"Right!"

Commander Haines and Number One were already searching it with their night glasses.

"Looks like a boat, sir," Number One hazarded.

"Stand by!" Haines turned with the order. "Give our signal!"

A light blinked swiftly and went out. From behind screen and gun-shields men peered waiting. No answer was returned.

"It's not Fritz or we should have heard from him," said Haines. He remained with lifted glasses, breathing quickly.

"It's a boat, sir. I'll swear to it," Number One urged.

"Believe you're right, old thing. Dead slow! Looks like a dud . . . Stop! Full astern . . . Stop! . . . Signal squadron to circle at full speed."

They lay in a bath of foam sizzling forward along each beam. J 54 and X 42 moved out of shadow and commenced to race round and round with the flagship as centre.

"Put on our glim," Jimmy Haines ordered.

K 89 lay quite still as the searchlight opened. She no longer flicked at the swell. Spray and wind suddenly lost power. An immense hush fell upon those who waited and watched. The beam swept out, white upon the sea. It moved here, there, starboard, port, searching the hills, peering into valleys abnormally developed under its eye. It swept up against the blackness, climbed with the swell and suddenly became still, concentrated on a small white boat, a boat which lay in a drifting spume which looked like fog.

No U-boat there. A decoy, perhaps. God knows!

Again the searchlight roved. There! What is that? Lines in the sea, tracks made by the swell . . . sea-horses. There . . . there!—Nothing.

The light came back to look upon the boat. It stood out white as never before it had been white. It had neither sail nor mast nor directing force . . . no one rowing. Everything still as the glare. . . . A ghost-boat of the British Merchant Service—nothing less.

"A small push ahead! Steady helm!"

They crept nearer. J 54 swept through the beam of light, a phantom in chase of phantoms.

"Stop!"

They came close and halted, nose in air.

"Ship's boat," said Haines. "Seems badly smashed for'ard . . . what's that in the gash—sticking up?"

"Look's like a man's legs, sir."

"God! You're right—and there are others too! Doctor ready there! Blankets, restoratives. . . . Look smart!"

Haines crossed to the voice-pipe. "We've got a boat close 'longside," he said. "Work her fine . . . a touch ahead . . . boat from some torpedoed ship . . . Stop! I'm manœuvring to screen her."

He replaced the whistle and returned to the starboard wing. Immediately below him lay the boat.

CHAPTER VIII

WITCHES' CAULDRON

A WHITE boat, water-logged and pierced by bullets, sagged upon the swell. A boat of the clinker-built type, her bows stove in, water sloshing nearly to the thwarts—a man here, a man there, tossed upon her gunwale, lying on her bottom-boards—all wagging stark heads at the clouds.

Two men wearing duffle-suits and fastened about the middle to a line clambered from K 89 to search her. They looked swollen and grotesque in the glare that fell upon them. One moment they were clinging to the side of K 89, the next paddling knee-deep while the boat lurched, threatening to jettison both dead and living. They passed lines from the destroyer to steady her and turned to the bodies, searching as men do after action.

Appearances seemed to announce that all were dead. The man doubled over the steering oar wobbled and was of skeleton thinness; a shirt and drawers his garment, and round his neck knotted by the two corners hung an old blanket. His jaw had dropped, his eyes glazed, he seemed to yawn eternally. Two bodies rolled in the water at his feet . . . swollen, horrible.

From the stove-in bow a man's legs trailed crookedly with each gush of the sea. His feet and ankles were washed bare; from his shanks ribbons of flesh undulated like jelly-fish beside a wall. His head rolled as the water rolled—no life in any part of him, nor hope of it. A group of three jerked puppet limbs behind him, the arm of one broken—all dead, some pierced with bullets, others starved. Amidships were two, one with a torn shoulder, the other a wounded thigh, high up, bound about and about with sacking. Ten men of the British Merchant Service, nine succumbed to the slow processes of wounds and hunger. Each man of them a man. Each man of them slashed, cut and tossed half-naked into a boat to rot by gallant Germany.

The two ghosts from K 89 turned them one by one, searched them, put them overboard. The sea leaped about each as he plunged, hid them in turn—Knights of England whose names will never be known. A tenth remained to search, and the ghosts stooped over him. A man clad in blue broadcloth, faded, gold on his cuffs, tarnished brass buttons, the kit of an officer—but wounded, wet, waiting untended where a shambles had lain.

The ghosts consulted. "Dead men don't bleed," said one. "Don't seem to belong to this crowd," the other jerked out. They bent over, listening for heartbeats and detected a flutter.

"Case for the doctor," said the first.

"Believe you're right," said the second.

"Line down, sir! He's for more dollars . . . for sure."

They sent him up when the sea gave permission, in a slung stretcher, then turned for instructions.

"Hole her tanks!" cried the deck. "We don't want her."

Good! Let her follow her men when she would. Let her sink over them, hide them, form a screen for them—if she would. She was hacked and pierced in a score of places; but she had brought her men to the hustings and the world would know of their fate when Whitehall pleased. The ghosts saw these things; but they saw no name, only her port of registry—Glasgow, and the ineffaceable evidence of her dead. They reminded each other when they again stood on deck that if the chap they had sent up "wasn't gone west," he would be able to explain all that.

Jimmy Haines, watching from the bridge, saw the man hoisted on board. The light which shone down on him showed that he was an officer of sorts; a man with a short, fair beard of rather stubby growth; a man very near death. He heard the doctor's verdict as he slit a trouser leg and called to Pay, telling him where to press; saw him fix hastily a tourniquet.

Alive, then! Good! Now we shall know, was Jimmy's thought. Then he saw the doctor stooping and beginning the movements for artificial respiration . . . a long job.

Nearly gone, after all, Jimmy thought; then, as other duties claimed him, he called to the yeoman, "Signal for line ahead, fifteen knots as before," and crossed to the engine-room voice-tube. "Going ahead directly, fifteen knots," he said. "Think we've saved one of them—luck, eh?"

He listened to the answer, laughed and said, "Yes; but there's the U-boat to consider. . . . Ready?"

A minute later K 89 began to head round to bow the seas, leading off in her capacity of flagship while the two who followed slowly reached position.

Half an hour later a message came from the cabin known as sick-bay asking Haines to spare a moment when it was possible. The surgeon-probationer was anxious, the man he tended far on his way to the Ferry.

But Jimmy was unable to go. So much depended on the Squadron Commander that it was nearly two o'clock before he

could leave the bridge. He was concerned with the burden of direction, and the lesser problem scarcely counted in the presence of the greater.

The squadron was heading up Channel again, spread out in line abreast. It had swept down without sighting the enemy, until it became necessary to try back. The wind had increased and rain loomed behind it. The hunter trio rolled more, yawed more brazenly; the counter-wave had grown in height, the sea was more luminous, but otherwise nothing had happened to put them out of their stride. They were in for a dusting—all else was with Joss.

Number One was lying down clad in coat and oilskins, his bed a corner beneath the screen on the bridge; but Haines put him in charge without compunction. He got up with a cheery "Right-o!" called for a cup of cocoa and got out his glasses.

"Anything about, sir?"

"Devil the thing! Pills is getting funky," Haines answered. "Squad in line abreast, fifteen—all O.K."

With that he turned and went below. He entered the cabin, closed the door where Pills awaited him, and stared at the patient. He was impenitent for his long delay. It could not be helped. "Any better?" he asked, approaching.

"Comatose," said the surgeon. "Nearly bled white . . . seems to have lost the use of his pins; but we may save him."

He reached out and held the pallid wrist. "A trifle stronger now, if that's any use to him," he added.

"Spinal?"

"Not easy to say yet . . . but it looks like it."

Haines stood quite near; but the light was shaded. He bent over and suddenly became intent, turned jerkily round and pushed back the screen, came back, stared.

"Spoken yet?" he asked at length.

"No—too far gone."

"But he lives—eh?"

The surgeon held a small mirror over his mouth. He showed it. It was clouded—that was all.

Jimmy Haines acknowledged that he understood. He bent nearer, standing so that he was face to face with this man, the light at its best. Apparently he had gleaned nothing when he straightened his back; but in his mind he knew he had seen Jag. His voice had a new ring, his phrases were less clipped when he spoke.

"I'm sorry I couldn't get down sooner," he said. "Have you been here long?"

"Ever since."

"Hum! and it's devilish fuggy. Wonder if you'd care for a smoke? I'll relieve you for ten minutes, if that's any use..." Haines questioned, while at the back of his mind a voice sang, "Jag! Jag! Your brother Jag who loves..."

The surgeon's clear tones interrupted that with, "It's awfully good of you to think of it, sir—just what I do want. It would buck me heaps."

He was young, the red and gold band he wore brand-new, his profile aquiline, keen.

"Cut along, then! . . . Nothing I can do, I suppose?"

"Only watch."

"Right-o! I'm in charge."

He spoke lightly; but when the cabin door snapped, Jimmy's eyes were clouded. He leaned over again, his pulses thumping. A whisper escaped, "Good God!" That was all, but he flushed hot with the words and then, curiously, was cold.

He stooped low, gently pressing up the sick man's eyelid. The eyes would tell him, he thought; but beneath his touch the eye flickered, white, the iris out of sight. It told him nothing—yet in his mind Jimmy knew it was Jag. The name still rang in his brain. Jag who was dead and now was alive . . . Jag who was whole and now was coming maimed to claim Dorothea. Ghastly!

Again Jimmy stood erect, measuring the man's proportions with a glance. He was tall, rather taller than Jimmy; broad; but yellow-white, jaundiced, shrunken. His chest was gone. Hollows lay beneath his eyes; his cheeks had fallen in, and the stubble which clothed his lips and cheeks and chin accentuated the cadaverous outline with a glint of gold. The temples, too, had fallen in and across them were blue veins which stood out like whipcord. . . . Jag could not look like that! Absurd! Jimmy was the victim of hallucination brought on by much brooding. He must know! That was his one coherent thought. He must make sure.

He glanced at his wrist-watch aware of the flight of time, round the cabin, as though he dreaded espionage, and again leaned over, turning back the man's sleeve. What did it matter who saw? The question did not trouble him. He could not have explained why he desired secrecy; why he had glanced round,

A nameless fear assailed him. That he knew, hated and tried to push away at the same moment. Asinine ! He had less nerve than a rabbit—for this sort of thing. He got the sleeve nearly to the man's elbow. A group of flags showed, the red, blue and white ensigns of England draped upon a central shield carrying a cross and lions rampant in red. Phit ! Every sailorman carried that mark. It was part of his initiation, one of the crude ideographs of the sea . . . almost a bond—if there were a bond between the two Services !

He twisted the arm so that it became possible to see higher ; pushed up the sleeve and found on the upper arm a cobra lifted upon its coil, its head thrust forward to strike. The snake was wonderfully wrought in blue rings with blood-red eyes and tongue.

For a moment Jimmy seemed inclined to laugh. The feeling swept up suddenly with the hot flush which again assailed him. As though he could have been mistaken ! As though proof were necessary between men born of the same mother ; between men who had fought and wrangled and loved as boys under the same roof. Phit ! He was hot. What in the world had come to him . . . ? “Jag,” said the voice, “Jag who will rob you of Dorothea, spoil your life and calmly propose to toss for it as in the old lane at home.”

Again Jimmy turned and glanced round the room. It was quiet, lighted brilliantly as before, but the voices were not quiet. “Life,” they said, “is for the strong . . . Love is for those who are fit . . . Life and love are concomitants one of the other—they are yours for the taking, yours till the curtain rings down. Why not ? Is he not dead ? . . .”

Jimmy looked at his brother. He was breathing with a singular gasp ; the right carotid up there beside the column of his neck pulsed with a new vigour. Spasmodic, perhaps ? But it was the carotid of one who had lost the use of his limbs . . . who could not walk——

Good God ! What was the value of life to such wreckage ? Could he enjoy it ? Better be dead . . . and if he could not enjoy it, what of Dorothea ? Would Jag wish to live, crippled perhaps, shorn of a limb perhaps . . . with that new mask which was his and was not Jag's . . . features which no one would recognize ? Might he not hurt Dorothea as other girls had been hurt when they saw what had come home to their arms . . . ? Horrible ! The notion threw Jimmy back on the intimacies of love, the

beautiful dalliances. Who could fondle a man like that . . . would he desire fondling . . . if the trouble was spinal, how could he desire anything but death ?

All Jimmy's æsthetic senses were in arms. All his horror of cripples, the armless, legless, eyeless . . . the tragedies one used to see in Town holding out tin cups for pennies ; exposing from little go-carts their hurts to the crowd ; shorn atoms who now were aping the soldiers who crawled about the streets on crutches dressed like stage pirates in blue and white slops with flaunting red ties . . .

Jag like one of these . . . Dorothea tied to him ! Jag who always fell on his feet and now would have no feet to fall on . . . Jag who used to be so hale, so cock-a-hoop, so debonair. Would he desire to live on such terms ; to drag out the rest of his life in a go-cart ?

The carotid artery fascinated Jimmy Haines. He wondered, not knowing he wondered, how much pressure was necessary. He bowed over his brother's form hiding his eyes and said in his heart, that if ever he came out maimed, shorn in mind or body, he prayed that some good soul would administer the dose he always carried, and bundle him whither God willed.

He glanced at his watch in spite of his stress and saw that at any moment the surgeon might return. Continuing the movement, he found his eyes resting on Jag's. For a short minute they remained open, fixed on him, smiling. Then again they were closed. Wonderful ! A nearly imperceptible sigh escaped ; but the smile lingered. It did not fade.

Jimmy was on his knees beside his brother when the surgeon came in ; but no one judging him as he rose could have accused him of praying—least of all a probationer.

His eyes flamed as he spoke.

" I.X.L. of the U-boat," he said, " is here." And with a backward nod, " He is my brother. Amazing ! " Then in a swift whisper, " If he's whole and sane, for God's sake mend him . . . if he's the other thing, end him."

" Your brother ! " the surgeon repeated, quick to read signs.

" Not a doubt of it," said Jimmy Haines. " What's the verdict ? "

The surgeon was fingering his patient's pulse.

" Afraid I was unduly pessimistic," he said frankly. " Fugg, I expect. He's better. Curious—you've done him good."

Jimmy's eyes stood the scrutiny. He smiled even as his heart sank. He knew that Jag would hole out.

"Nearly drove me dotty," he threw off. "I wouldn't be a doctor for nuts."

The cabin door snapped. He was gone.

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Dawn. A bank of clouds piled high in the sou'-west, a smudge of white where the sun stirred shadows—seas running mistily in a wilderness of grey. Spume everywhere, rain everywhere, a gorgeous blend which drove with the wind, drenching men already wet to the skin.

Ahead, the semblance of light made a blurred pathway for the hunters to tread; astern, the swell broken up, seas climbing out of it and raising white crests which fizzled as they ran. Only the hunters afoot, splaying broad wakes as they went; rolling, climbing, nose in air one long-drawn minute; stern lifted the next and launched for the pit—but always, and at all angles, propellers churning out foam.

Scuttles closed, dead lights clamped, hatchways secured; the decks a torrent of swirling water licked white by obstructions while seeking escape. No smoke from either vessel—only a stench as they passed, and over them the greater cormorants moving as on planes, tilting, diving, soaring like the albatross of Cape Horn.

Below deck an Engineer-Commander, standing in a bath of sweat, watched men burnishing teak, polishing levers and all that brass and steel fitment which holds in place the turbine casings. On the bridge a Lieutenant-Commander, standing in a bath of spray and rain, stared out over a screen which flapped like a sail hanging in the gear, bellied like a sail and was useless as a screen. He leaned back against the wind praying for luck, in spite of his handicap, resolute in his quest, as if the gods smiled. He had been on duty since they left port thirty-six hours ago, yet was alert. He had talked in the small hours with Dorothea, and learned that she was perturbed. He knew this gale would add to her stress. She would be alarmed now for his safety as well as for Jag's . . . as though it mattered one iota, seeing Jag was below, what fate had in store for a Lieutenant-Commander who had lost.

He clung to his theory here. Jag would win as he always had. How could it be otherwise, seeing he had Dorothea's prayers, the

Owner's simple theology—his own splendid structure to aid him ? Jag had won, and his brother had lost—that was the alpha and omega of the matter. Jimmy would play the game precisely as he was playing it now. Osborne, Dartmouth and the Naval tradition had seen to that. Again, how could it be otherwise, when you remember his training ?

He smiled as he thought of his scare down there in sick-bay, his fear of ghastliness, shock for Dorothea and the rest ; now that it appeared from the surgeon's report that the " loss of his pins " was due to saturation and not to wounds. The bullet had passed through the left thigh close to the femoral artery. Jag might be lame, but the limb was safe—provided saturation had not gone too deep.

And now, as it was growing light, a " snotty " arrived with a cup of hot cocoa, and the Commander took it with a jest which went to the heart of the boy who was new to the sea and its moods. " Last night," Haines said, " we had the invitation to the waltz—this is the dance itself . . . like it ? "

" I like it better when it's dry, sir."

" Epicure ! Run away to my cabin and fill my pipe—the one with a cover ; light it and bring it up. I'm dead for a smoke."

The boy hurried away, his face a picture.

Jimmy sipped cocoa and fell back on his dreams, on the long-drawn quest upon which he was engaged, with the sang-froid of a sailor. He was accustomed to think and direct operations at the same time. All sailors who reach command must have this dual faculty, sometimes the power to add a third to it—if they would keep sane. Meanwhile he drank cocoa until he felt warm and alive ; took the lighted pipe from young Stuart and stared at a garden while facing the sea. He saw Dorothea swinging under the boughs of a giant cedar which flourished on the Owner's lawn, and at the same instant ordered the two wing destroyers to go out and home at full speed for a mile, while K 89 continued soberly at fifteen in the centre.

He remembered the attitude Dorothea took in the swing ; how her hair floated on the breeze she made, how joyous were her eyes, how witching her cry to him—sometimes—" Oh ! Jimmy, you might give me a shove ! " her laughter when he complied. He saw her after battles royal, when he and Jag and Madge harnessed the pony and drove post to Low Willows holding her to ransom for strawberries plucked from the astronomer's fruit

beds . . . That had been the beginning of the end as far as Jimmy was concerned, and now it was done with, finished as definitely as if Dorothea had said so in words . . .

Nothing in sight but the sea, no hint of enemy action . . . nothing but the rolling clouds of spray and rain driving up to blot out the rising sun ; the interminable slosh of water boarding K 89, the swish of the gale and a girl who called naïvely to be pushed.

Nothing coming over the wires either from the Base or from the squadron ; light slowly evolving in a wilderness of brooding sheen ; a broader pathway in making, the road to the stars plainly limned and the seas which thundered at their quarter running nearly to the bow, hissing at the advent of others.

Jimmy released a button at his throat and took a fresh turn with his muffler. He was cold, in spite of the cocoa, in spite of his pipe—only the tip of his nose was warm. He was wet. He might have wrung his muffler while he had his oilskin open ; but he did not. He was engrossed, working out mentally a problem in navigation which now was occupying Number One. Where were they, after these backings and twistings . . . near or far from their objective ? If only Jag had come out of his trance Jimmy could have obtained definite news of this U-boat ; but he was still comatose, unutterably weak, and dead-reckoning must solve the problem. They seemed to have lost touch with the U-boat. She no longer spluttered. Dorothea swayed in her swing.

The two outlying boats were on their return journey again, wallowing in a beam sea which threatened to end them ; yet they remained, jerkily conforming to the laws of gravity and the builder's formula. They came in clad in spume without news or any hope of it. They turned to position and counted their scars. A skylight smashed, a ventilator ripped out, water in cabins and flats . . . bagatelles—work for the dockyard and men on fat wages.

Nothing in sight but the sea, the dim wave cressets combing, yellow in a growing dawn . . . God ! how good it would be to get a wash and a shave, sit a while in the lounge, talk to Dorothea and turn in. . . . Even the cormorants were gone home to preen their wings and huddle in the cliffs. . . . Nothing left ! Visions dead, love vanished, time speeding, death in the van and a Commander and a crew who had been all night at stations, stretching

wet limbs at the dawn, still on watch, still alert and pretending they liked it.

Then gunfire . . . intermittent, definite, wind-blown from out there where the gale boomed . . . gunfire, and with it the splutter and hiss of wireless in a cabin remote from the bridge, giving the perennial cry of distress—S.O.S. S.O.S.

Where away now ?

No sleep in Jimmy's eyes when the message came to him, pipe thrust to fizzle in a pocket as wet as his coat, glasses ready, an order already on its way to twin destroyers lazing at fifteen knots.

Then K 89 swung round to face the sea which raced to bury her. Her wireless spluttered giving her reply. She led—line of column ahead her method—and the S.O.S. ceased. She stood on end as though eager to stare through the smother, flopped and buried her nose in the brine. She danced round joggling ; masts swaying, stays singing, a white counter-wave climbing to throttle her . . . then away, ding-dong through the spume, ding-dong for the new quarry, the old quarry, any old quarry, her teeth set, grim as a bulldog. And astern of her followed twin shadows, plunging as she plunged, keen as she was keen—sleep thrown to the winds !

Gunfire at sea means but one thing—fighting. When it comes with S.O.S. there is an additional meaning—some one in peril. There had been a plethora of S.O.S. for the Lizard patrol. It had brought the Duty-trot squadron out at full speed sometimes through the sheer imbecility of those who signalled, as Jimmy had said ; but it had not taken the edge off the men who manned it. It had brought cruisers racing from their beat to find nothing ; a stray spar ambling as a periscope, a litter of planks posing as a U-boat . . . a Merchantman keen on his find. It had brought cachinnation and swear-words from men who know how to use both—but it had never brought neglect. How could it ? Were not these men brothers ?

The firing died. It rose again. A point more to port ! Line abreast ! They cannot be far !

No sign, though. No smoke or flash of gun could pierce that smother. Barbettes under at every dive, destroyers standing still, tilting for a plunge . . . destroyers, nose in air, streaming rivulets upon opacity ; decks white, taffrails buried . . . propellers kicking for a new start !—so they came sou'-west towards Ushant, lolloping to give aid.

A message arrived from below miraculously dry in the hands of a man who emerged as from the sea. Jimmy crouched in an angle of the screen to read it. "Telefunken at last," he said to young Bradley, "uncoded . . . but it points."

A squall rose out of the blackness ahead and passed shrieking to leeward. Rain fell in a deluge licking crests from the sea, pitting it white. A smother of drift spray swept by and with it the sou'-west brightened, edged away to west and lifted in an arch which was perfect.

"Nor'-west shift," said the Commander. "Hail instead of rain; snow, sleet, everything."

"Let it come," Bradley raved back. "Can't be worse . . . Lord! Look at X 42."

Haines was watching. "Out of control," he said tersely. "Ask what is wrong."

An answer came back so swiftly that it was obviously in preparation when the question was made. "Steering gear gone. Hopeless."

"That clinches it," said Jimmy; "send her home. Ask if assistance is wanted."

"No." X 42 replied that she would get there if the crew had to get out and push. That, paraphrased, was the answer given as she vanished behind a roller.

"Luck!" said Jimmy. "My star seems on the wane."

Firing had ceased as the squall drove up, but now in the new light a steamer was seen perhaps a mile distant. She showed her broadside, two stumpy masts and a funnel with twin red bands. She was deep in the water, her sides loomed up like a patched carpet, and the seas swept over her. She lay in a haze of spray upon which light fell as through a prism. The Red Ensign was at her masthead, and as the destroyers drew out of the smother a shell struck the sea to leeward, throwing a column of spray perhaps a mile distant.

Haines turned to mark where it fell, but nothing appeared to warrant the shot. He hoisted a signal ordering her to "Cease fire," crept nearer, and the yeoman waved flags which said, "What are you firing at?"

"U-boat down wind."

"Where away?"

The *Marathon* made answer in degrees, precise as a logician; but K 89 and her consort were unable to spot any enemy.

"See her now?" asked the bridge.

"Yes—a mere plank. Awash."

"Have you hit her?"

"No."

"And we're too low," Jimmy commented.

The two drove at full speed past the ship, turned, swept to leeward, came back zigzagging, twisting, never still, and the talk went on, flag-wagged, as the phrase goes, between bridges.

"Are you torpedoed?" asked Jimmy, drawing near.

"No. Don't think the beggar has one."

"Then he has not fired at all?"

"Devil the fire," a bass voice roared through a megaphone. "Think he's adrift. We've been trying to pot him . . . of course we stand in if you get him."

Again they were out of hail. Port helm! Round with her! Seas smothered the pair, but they emerged half blind and sarcastic.

"You, Captain, or your Owners?" sang Jimmy through his megaphone as they neared.

"Both," cried the *Marathon's* bridge.

"Nothing doing!" Jimmy roared as they swept past heading now for the U-boat. "I've been out two nights and a day seeking him. We are wet."

"I wonder," the *Marathon* rejoined, "you aren't drunk."

"We are," Jimmy asserted with the flags. "Wrong blend, though."

K 89 and her consort swept down wind with the swish of a hail-squall on corrugated iron. They made no straight lines. They zigzagged with a reel and a lurch which seemed to imply truth to the *Marathon's* gibe. They yawed brazenly and without shame, but with a method which spoke for sobriety. Seas tumbled over them with a unanimity of effort that seemed to suggest plan; but there was no plan, only a magnificent disturbance of the laws of gravity—a factor which at sea is productive of wet shirts.

Only the engine-room remained dry. In the cabins and ward-room there was water. On deck men dripped rivulets of brine, yet remained keen. They swore with each new drenching. Teeth chattered over sentences which were not dithyrambic, but sober. The watch could lift glasses to their eyes, but could not maintain a steadiness of poise. The deck was a spring-board, compelling jerkiness. Only the life-lines and "gammon-lashings" kept men from the ditch; for centrifugal force in a destroyer at grips with

a gale is in flux each moment with its centripetal brother. And the ditch yawns awaiting catastrophe. It sends up seas to add to the *mélange*. They approach with an immense discretion, angling as it were to catch men unprepared, and suddenly spit out like a cat on the approach of a dog.

Then the torrent flows over, bashes you, leaves you dangling at the end of your "gammon-lashing," dips you overside, slaps your face, tosses you back with a roar of apology. Sorry! Only my fun! How d'you feel?

It was as though the sea cocked a snook and cried "Yah!" in the ear of each victim.

They were all victims; yet Jimmy Haines, Bradley and the rest moved through these contortions with the calm of men engaged in back-somersaulting from trapeze to trapeze before an audience. They could not be wetter, for they dribbled like full sponges. They were nearing a stage when they could not be colder; when the hot cocoa they drank failed to produce warmth, and one at a time they would have to go down to "thaw out." Yet the rain had ceased, and if they had luck the sun would perhaps shine, throw its cold beams upon them as they ran the last trail . . . please God for home.

But that predicated victory in this search they were conducting; a sunken or surrendered U-boat together with many peradventures still in the clouds.

They had run their mile or more without sighting the enemy. Was the beast watching their capers and angling for a pot-shot?

Jimmy argued from knowledge; Bradley, the Curly Gang's contribution to K 89's bridge, from hearsay and recent experience. No U-boat, they concurred, could lie on the surface in this popple; they questioned if immersion for periscope ranging was possible either—yet old man *Marathon* swore he had seen him. Bradley supposed he knew what he was talking of. Jimmy was uncertain—still, he couldn't have fired all those shells for nothing. Try back.

They came round to dance once more into a head sea which threatened annihilation. *Marathon* was fading in the western blur, her absurd sides glowing in dissolving patches. No use asking him questions . . . they must stick it till they saw something—and in five minutes the conning-tower of a submarine lay on their port bow. Bradley spotted it and pointed, just as a sea creamed over it.

"Can't be," said Jimmy, but he gave the signal to be ready

with the guns. "We have just passed over that section," he added in the tones of one quite unconvinced; then suddenly, "Gad! You're right . . . it's a submarine . . . none of ours in this section. Stand by!" He manœuvred for position. J 54 was flag-wagging the news.

"Right-o!" said Jimmy. "Tell him we aren't blind."

"Says enemy flying white flag, sir," the yeoman of signals persisted.

"White flag, eh? . . . Good God! True, too," he stared through his glasses. "Our luck. . . . Acknowledge it, yeoman! Our luck, Bradley—after this wetting!"

They swerved to approach, seas leaping to the gun screens, and a man appeared, his hands in the air. Two others followed. They stood bunched in the conning-tower, gesticulating, shouting, one pointing to the flag they flew while the spray drove over them all impartially. They clung there, wind-blown and dishevelled as the T.B.'s came round. "Kamerad!" they shouted in unison. "Kamerad! Kamerad!" It sounded like a dirge.

"Lord!" Jimmy ground out, "but I'd love to scupper you. Kamerad! No, by God! we aren't that . . ."

Then on the flags in his best German—"Can you speak English?"

A voice came back through a megaphone:

"*Ja!* I speak not mouch. We your preesoners are . . . we obey what you say."

"Are you Kommandant?"

"*Nein!* I petty officer . . . Captain dead."

"Where are your officers and crew?"

"Officer none got—ozzers in Gontrol!"

"Clamp the hatch!"

"Vot—I not onderstand?"

"Fasten the crew down—or I sink you."

"Sare—I do it."

Jimmy took K 89 on a voyage of inspection. He circled the U-boat examining as well as he was able the truth of these statements. He could see faces pressed against the glass of the scuttles, jibbering, perhaps praying for mercy, as he passed, and a sense of his triumph thrilled in his veins. The men in the conning-tower watched, hands in air. J 54 stood off bowing the seas, ready if need be to use force.

"Seems to be O.K.," was Jimmy's comment, "think I shall risk it; risk it, or sink her, Number One? Rather a crow to

tow her in, though. Buck up the man-in-the-street, eh ? We'll do it."

Number One was decided, but his teeth chattered over the words and he looked blue.

"Something adrift with your circulation," Haines castanetted in reply. "Mine ditto . . . Lord ! send us a fire."

He turned with megaphone lifted. "Are your engines in order ?" he asked.

"All is goodt but ze planes, sare. Zey broke. Somesing—I not know."

"Come up to the surface—right up."

In five minutes this was done, the conning-tower on a level with the bridge of K 89.

"Full speed ahead . . . Course nor'-west. Let her have it. I shall accompany you on one quarter, J 54 on the other . . . understand ?"

"*Ja, Ja!* I onderstand, sare."

"If I see any attempt to submerge," Haines raved, "I shall sink you without warning—let them all understand that."

"*Ja! Ja!* I tell zem . . . I give my wordt. I petty officer. Once I in your ships sail . . . I know."

"Right-o ! Full ahead. If I wish to alter the course I will signal. Carry on !"

They started on the home trail jubilant, and an hour before dusk ran triumphantly past Lizard, steamed into smooth water and took off their oilskins. Outside the gale boomed with a new lease from nor'-west. Squalls swept up still striving to blind them ; but St Anthony sent its beam through the murk, leading them, welcoming them.

They came in, in column of line abreast until the harbour sheltered them, then K 89 took her place in the van, J 54 dropped astern and they passed to their buoys amid the crowing of horns.

Falmouth was elated, the waterside thronged, Jimmy proud as a retriever carrying the tail feathers of the bird he had mauled. He knew that presently he would shrink under the stick his master would wield ; but it came more quickly than he expected. It came in the shape of a signal from the Base. Dorothea sent it. A message welcoming his return and asking more especially for news of Jag.

To this Jimmy replied without heat :

"Jag is below, tucked between blankets—I wish we could change places."

And when he had sent it Jimmy wondered what Dorothea would make of it. Would she understand it, would Jag if he knew . . . did Jimmy himself understand it ?

He wished in that moment of bitterness that he was wounded, fighting with death and that death might conquer. He had no desire to live. Without Dorothea he knew that life would be death. He had no desire to test it.

CHAPTER IX

LINKS

THE cheering had died away, the crowd gone home satisfied with its effort. Whistles and horns no longer echoed from hill to hill nor rolled across the bay with strident note. Falmouth had come out to see its Show, the visible token of hours of peril, wet shirts and splendid seamanship. It had seen it file past in pageant form. A U-boat flying the white flag and towed by one of the Duty Squad ; while following at arm's length was T.B.D. K 89, *couchant*, ready to strike.

Jimmy Haines, the boy Commander of the Squad, stood on his small bridge to give orders. Below, in the cabin which did duty for sick-bay, his brother slept ; but until the procession had passed into the keeping of the C.-in-C. and an interpreter had exercised his skill, neither Jimmy nor any of those who cheered knew what was the connection between the U-boat and Jag Haines.

Then, when the Hunter trio were again in their nook far down the harbour, while the crews smoked and dried their clothes, some part of Jag's adventure leaked out and the crowd assembled in the neighbourhood of the hospital to give vent to their feeling. It leaked farther and presently reached a special correspondent at the port. The story went the rounds. People had seen Jag Haines carried ashore and had learned he was connected with the Commander of the Squad. They had seen Dorothea, Sir Douglas and the Rector enter the hospital, and some waited hoping to see them come out. But the factor which appealed instantly was the story of Jag's daring when later it became evident that he had been prisoner in the U-boat. Little Edwards, of the *London Daily*, came on the scene here when he questioned pertinently of the Flag-Lieutenant, " But *why* can't I give the full story of U 59 to the people ? Wouldn't it hearten them, stifle some of the croakers and scotch the demon of discontent which is about ? "

" True—it might," said the Lieutenant between puffs, " and it might not. Croakers are born, not made. My Chief isn't taking the risk. But "—he sawed the air with an expressive pipe-stem—" I'll tell you what that story of yours would do. It would tell Germany what happened to U 59 and U blankity-blank would be hustled out to take her place. By withholding the news we get a bit of a pull, see ? "

" Um ! " said little Edwards.

" So the equation stands like this," Flags drove home. " If

we let you hearten the B.P. with this story, how many sailors do you suppose you will drown ? And, as an offset, how much demon of discontent will you have scotched ? ”

Little Edwards blinked behind shining glasses. “ Um ! ” he said again. “ Yes—that puts the lid on it.”

The smoke from Flags’ pipe seemed to find the essential chorus. Falmouth, too, knew enough at this time to bar panegyrics. The war in Flanders was far off, but ships and sailors were near. They were the men who fought out there beyond St Anthony, Lizard, Wolf and the foam-girt Scillies. They came back sometimes so torn by wounds and the sea that Falmouth scarcely knew them for her sons. So the Press held its peace, and men got down on their knees in church and chapel to pray for the recovery of Jag Haines, the bo’sun and those two balmy ones who had stuck it.

And beside Jag’s bed Dorothea prayed to the God of battles that He in His mercy should give her back her man. It may be, too, that God heard her, and, seeing the splendid youth of this sailor who lay at His feet, gave her her desire.

Jag was of those who die hard. Science did what it could for him ; nurses gave him aid, his constitution did the rest. At the end of the first twenty-four hours the effects of saturation and exposure had given way. He slept rationally, healthily, and the surgeon-probationer who had mended his hurts while Jimmy marched the bridge, on coming in to see how he fared, smiled and went back to his ship happy.

On the second day, towards evening he roused somewhat, looked about him, smiled and again slept. But Dorothea, who caught the gleam, did not sleep. Outside a blackbird sang his message of love and trust. To the garden beyond Dorking it drew her ; to the great cedar where she swung and sometimes climbed and tore her dresses ; to the Common beneath Leith Hill where she and Jimmy and Jag fished and strayed, escaping peril, as was their birthright.

To the edge of Dawn she dreamed and watched, noting the stars as they crept out in the heavy silence of that night when Jag had called her to him, and she had listened to his song even as presently they had listened to the nightjar’s croak . . . because, look at it as you will, it is only once we love, only once, and then it is for always, always.

The garden was hers, the terrace where they stood hers, the nightjar a mere accident flung down to stress the splendid moon ;

innocent as love itself—not luck, not anything! . . . and now, as the sun began to climb, she sat beside her lover, fighting with drowsy lids, afraid to draw her hand from his . . .

So it went on till the morning watch, which Jag had so often explained was the last misery of sea-life, and her head sank till it rested on his pillow. In a moment she was asleep, quiet as the sea when the doldrums lay fingers on a ship's sails and hold them still.

Two bells.

The silver notes went the round of the bay, for it was five o'clock and various watchmen commenting in the usual way. Coffee. Coffee. Get your fires lighted. Shake a leg!

Perhaps it was the bells that aroused Dorothea. Perhaps the message was given by waves we scarcely understand—for Jag was awake, his eyes fixed on her eyes as they opened with wonder in their depths. A smile touched his lips when she stirred, and his voice was so small it seemed he whispered—"Doretta!" nothing more.

She clung to his hand, her face half hidden, stooping to it, nuzzling it without fear while she breathed his name; then again, swiftly conscious of her lapse, "I slept, dearest! I am so sorry."

"Tired out," he commented through cracked lips, his voice thin. "Poor little girl! When did you come . . . how did you know?"

She told him. Smiles greeted him while her heart sank. He was so weak—so weak.

His eyes remained intent, then he said, "But how did I get here?" with the slow articulation of one in his state.

Again Dorothea explained. Dawn stared in at the great windows, throwing rosy tints upon the walls, the white beds with their recumbent forms. On a bed near the door a sailor suddenly began to sing—a minor chant:—

"O blow the man down, O blow him away,
Hey-O! blow the man down . . ."

The ward Sister crossed and bent over him. The song died. Jag followed her with his eyes. "When did I come in?" he asked.

Again Dorothea explained, finally telling him that it was Jimmy who had found him and saved him. He remained a long time piercing this veil, then he said, "I sent a message . . . I.X.L.

before I . . .” and failed. The fingers of one hand were fussing with the beard which clothed his chin. It seemed to worry him. Then came, “Afraid—no, all confused still.”

“I know, I know. In a little while it will be clear if you rest,” she told him. “Go to sleep, my darling. When you wake you will remember.” And he surrendered, obedient to her desire. It took longer than Dorothea suggested to bring Jag back to life and make him understand why he could not piece together the events which had brought him so low. He slept bravely ; but his brain was alert and busy with impressions of the world beyond his windows coupled with memories of the scenes he had escaped.

He heard the cry of sea-birds squabbling over scraps drifting in the harbour, and dreamed of the birds which tried to alight on the periscope which Nekker tended. He heard the song of the wind sweeping across Pendennis, the thunder of the swell breaking on the sands, and imagined the heave and surge of it as it crept up the sands where he was pegged out. He heard the voices of those who nursed him—his father’s, the Admiral’s, Dorothea’s—yet imagined the unending monologue of Nekker as they drew near Channel.

Sometimes he struggled in his sleep, sometimes called out orders which set the room wondering ; and sometimes he muttered and rolled his head until Dorothea returned to take his hand and lay her own upon his forehead.

Then one morning while Jimmy stood beside him he awoke shivering, his eyes intent on finding Dorothea. A gale was blowing from the west and the song of the sea came up to them as they faced each other. Jimmy took his hand and, looking down at him, said, “Good ! I knew it. You’ll hole out, Old Thing, sure as God made little apples. . . .”

And after that it seemed no one spoke. Dorothea came in, the Padre, Sir Douglas, and Jimmy escaped to face the sea in one of the moods which flayed him.

And at tide-time next morning Jag awoke calm, with a new light in his eyes which Dorothea and her friends decided meant life.

CHAPTER X

BARHAM DOWNS

MARCH on the highlands behind Dover, the wind booming, night approaching, guns afar off shaking the Downs, and the pitted road lying like a crimson snake athwart the grass.

Not far from the cross-roads which lead to Sandwich on the one hand and to Folkestone on the other is Broome Park, the home of Lord Kitchener, on whom England still relied for her armies. Beyond it is the oak-beamed treasure-house of Sir Thomas Barham and the *Ingoldsby Legends*. Other villages abound, clustering amidst the trees or in the hollows which screen them from the wind. High they are set above the busy seaports, far from the road.

In a nearly straight line nor'-west and south-east lay this road which had taken fire at the beckoning of the sun. Until you drew near it made a vivid appeal, so splashed was it by cressets of flame which seemed to glow and roll amidst the purple grass-land bordering it. Then when you came near you discovered a track, black and shining with oil and grease, and above it a rampart of clouds low upon a flaming sky which scintillated through the trees which screened Broome Park.

Jag Haines, with Dorothea on one side and Effie on the other, leaned against a fence facing the road. Yet it was not of the road they spoke, but of the Patrol and the Expeditionary Force which stood between England and slavery ; of Jimmy, who talked of a possible smash at Zebrugge and hoped to be there . . . so that the red, pitted road might continue to carry men and stores to the ships waiting at the foot of the Downs. Beyond and beyond were the parks and farms, the fields of tender, growing corn, lanes and valleys which would be carpeted by bluebells, star-spangled by anemones, tufted with primroses all down the long vista of copse and nook which lay behind Broome Park.

Five months ago Jag Haines had been carried ashore to get mended. Three months ago he had stood with Dorothea in the old battlemented church at the back of Dover while the Padre made them one . . . and here was Effie halted to say good-bye and wave farewell to her friends. Jag no longer required a crutch—he left that, as one might say, at the church door—and Dorothea now sufficed as a prop on the one hand, while a stick

did duty on the other. Something of a limp there was as he walked ; but glowing health and happiness laughed it out of court.

A pilgrim with a fat purse staying at Barham when first these two arrived ventured to comment on the fact that Jag was neither in uniform nor badged. He seemed inclined to go farther, perhaps to consider the white-feather stupidity, when Jimmy Haines pushed to the front and said :

"That's Captain Haines, D.S.O.," with the correct emphasis. "A shirker ? Good Lord ! where have you been ? Why, he's the man who sunk the first U-boat ever tackled by a Merchant-man ! After that he was taken prisoner by the U-boat which torpedoed his ship. Then, if you ask me, he captured the thing single-handed and brought her into Falmouth without squeaking. And if you want any further information, he's my brother."

Perhaps the fact that Jimmy Haines was wearing the uniform of the Navy helped to substantiate the story. Jag never heard it. Dorothea did not know. As a matter of fact, they moved about the village and Downs with the air of people celebrating their silver wedding, and thought Barham believed them.

Some kind friend had lent them a two-seater and with it they ran about the lanes behind the road as they listed, sniffing the scent of early spring on the Downs. Sometimes Jag drove, sometimes Dorothea, and it would be difficult to decide which of them was the least competent mechanic. Luckily the tyres remained unpunctured, the engine behaved as an engine should, and life, in spite of rainy interludes, was a splendid dream come true ; the war, muttering and stumbling far away, nearly pushed out of mind.

But to-night Dorothea was sad. Effie was crossing to France, and Paris was to be her new hunting-ground. She said again, "I did so hope that was at an end. I hate to think of you being in touch with men who . . ."

"Don't, dear Kiddie ! Nothing matters now, only England. I can't sit still. I should be mad in a week. It makes me brood—and brooding brings wrinkles. Besides, if I couldn't help I should want to 'do myself in,' as they say now, just to end things." She said this so naturally and with such gentleness that it did not seem strange either to Dorothea or to Jag. She went on : "Why not ? I am Iphigenia—one born to sacrifice if we are to believe in fate when the fate of the world is in balance.

Besides, I want to find out who are our friends over there——” She stood looking a moment at the fading sunset, then turned and caught her friends’ hands. “Can’t stay, Old Thing! Trust me to hole out, as Jimmy says. I’ve got to see him, too, and get him out of the ‘Suicide Club.’ Dear old Jimmy! What pals we all were—all marching together to get into this mess . . . and the drowsy old world nodding; shameless!

“Au revoir once again. Can’t stop any longer. Light’s going, and you must get Jag home.”

She shook their hands, the leader now as always, kissed them, then faced the west, her eyes dim. “God! what a sunset. It reminds me of December ’14 when I was behind the lines at the Yser do, watching a bloody sky quaking to the thud of guns. Just that! Steaming like a vat in places. Look!” She pointed to a mist which rose from the valley which held Dover. “Like that . . . and I cross to-night. To-morrow in Paris, perhaps in touch with the tail that wags the dog . . . God bless you both. Another little parting. Go home, Jag. Take him, dear Kiddie, and forget all about Wassiter . . .”

She climbed into her car and slid away.

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Then one evening as they returned for dinner a letter bearing the Admiralty Seal lay on the table to greet them. It told Jag to hold himself in readiness for a call on the morrow, perhaps even the day following, and they sat over the fire considering the conundrum, Dorothea triumphant on Jag’s knees, his arms holding her there, hers about his neck lest he should escape.

“But I have no uniform here,” he said at last, “nothing but the old blue.”

“You’ll have to explain it all went down when you were scuppered,” Dorothea suggested, her cheek in the curve of his neck.

“I have my Warm and a cap somewhere. We’ll have to rake them out,” said Jag, a little breathlessly. “What can they want me for—court-martial?”

“Will they bother about that now?”

“Sure to. You see, I lost my ship.”

“P’raps it’s some more recognition, dearest,” she whispered, looking up.

“And p’raps it isn’t,” he joked, staring into her eyes.

“Or it may be to call you away, you know.”

He took some time to find an answer to this, for Dorothea's voice quivered, and he had to cure that.

"I expect it will be some new stunt. The Eastern Mail can't want me yet."

"Does that mean you will have to go?" she asked, her eyes busy.

"Got to go some time, dearest," he answered, holding her close.

She brightened suddenly. "Suppose it's from my Admiral, Jag. He said something about having it written in gold . . . and the other day I had a note from him. He wanted to know if you were quite fit, and I told him yes, because I thought perhaps he might be pulling strings, so I didn't tell you about it."

"Suppose we go and look out my Warm and cap, Dorette, then find out a train. I've been ashore an age. We'll have to get busy."

She was alert at once. "My kit, too, dearest. Yes—I shall come up, Jag. I shall come even if you promise to push me out of the carriage window. You aren't fit to be left alone yet. I could hide when you have to see the brass-hats. . . . *Please.*"

He took her in his arms, deciding it.

All through the night Dorothea clung to him considering her fate, and the while the tall old clock in the corridor clanged out the hours as though nothing had happened. Hour after hour. Hour after stillborn hour—the same tense whirr, brazen, full of menace; then the pause while the hammer drew back deciding how many blows he would strike; the start when it fell and the silent, wistful count till dawn was near.

At daylight when the sun looked in upon them she slept like a tired child, her head pillowed in the curve of his arm, her face flushed, tear-stained, but smiling where the dimples lay.

They were at breakfast when the amazing thing happened.

Jag was pretending to be hungry, Dorothea doing her best to be *facile comme tout*. The fire was brilliant, the sky grey; the toast and coffee delicious, when a car having R.N. in black upon it came to a stand just under their window.

Jag got up to look at it, Dorothea followed suit. It was the R.N. that chained them. Then a chauffeur marshalled by a waitress climbed to their floor and entered the room while Dorothea shivered. He crossed over and handed a sealed envelope addressed to—Lieutenant W. A. Haines, D.S.O., R.N., at which the two stared as though they read disaster.

"Open it," Dorothea pleaded, her face flushed and white in turn; while Jag, with the eyes of the Marine on him, possibly criticizing the old blue kit he had donned, made the best of it by accepting her advice.

"My dear Lieutenant," he read, aware that Dorothea had captured his arm and was reading also, "at all events let me be the first to give you your new title, and wish you rapid promotion. You earned it—the title, I mean. The other follows as we grow older.

"His Majesty was so interested in your story"—Jag paused to look at Dorothea ("I didn't know the King knew," he whispered), then went on reading—"in your story that he expressed a wish to see you. I explained that you were a mere castaway, just out of hospital and probably had no uniform of any sort; but he ordered me in that case to bring you in plain clothes."

Again Jag looked at Dorothea and whispered, "I'm in a devil of a funk," stopped because she squeezed his arm and read on—"Therefore, my dear boy, get yourself tricked out and into the car with Dorothea as soon as you can. The chauffeur will do the rest.

"Yours,

"D. C.

"P.S.—Tell Dorothea you will not be going afloat yet. You will first have to undergo some R.N. training.

"D. C.

"P.P.S.—Probably you will be ordered to Whale Island.

"D. C."

Dorothea looked at the chauffeur standing stiffly at attention, then at Jag. Jag was not thinking of the orderly; he was thinking of his mother at her first Drawing-room, and wondering if she would know. So Dorothea whispered, "Please dismiss him, dearest, or . . . or I . . ."

Then Jag came back from visions and gave the word. The door closed on them, and they were free to speak or keep silence as they willed.

Jag stared at the letter, but Dorothea pulled his sleeve—"Serendipity, my dear!" And with a sudden flicker—"Quick! Catch me! I want to laugh . . . and, and it makes me giddy!"

Then Jag came out of his dream and held her.





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